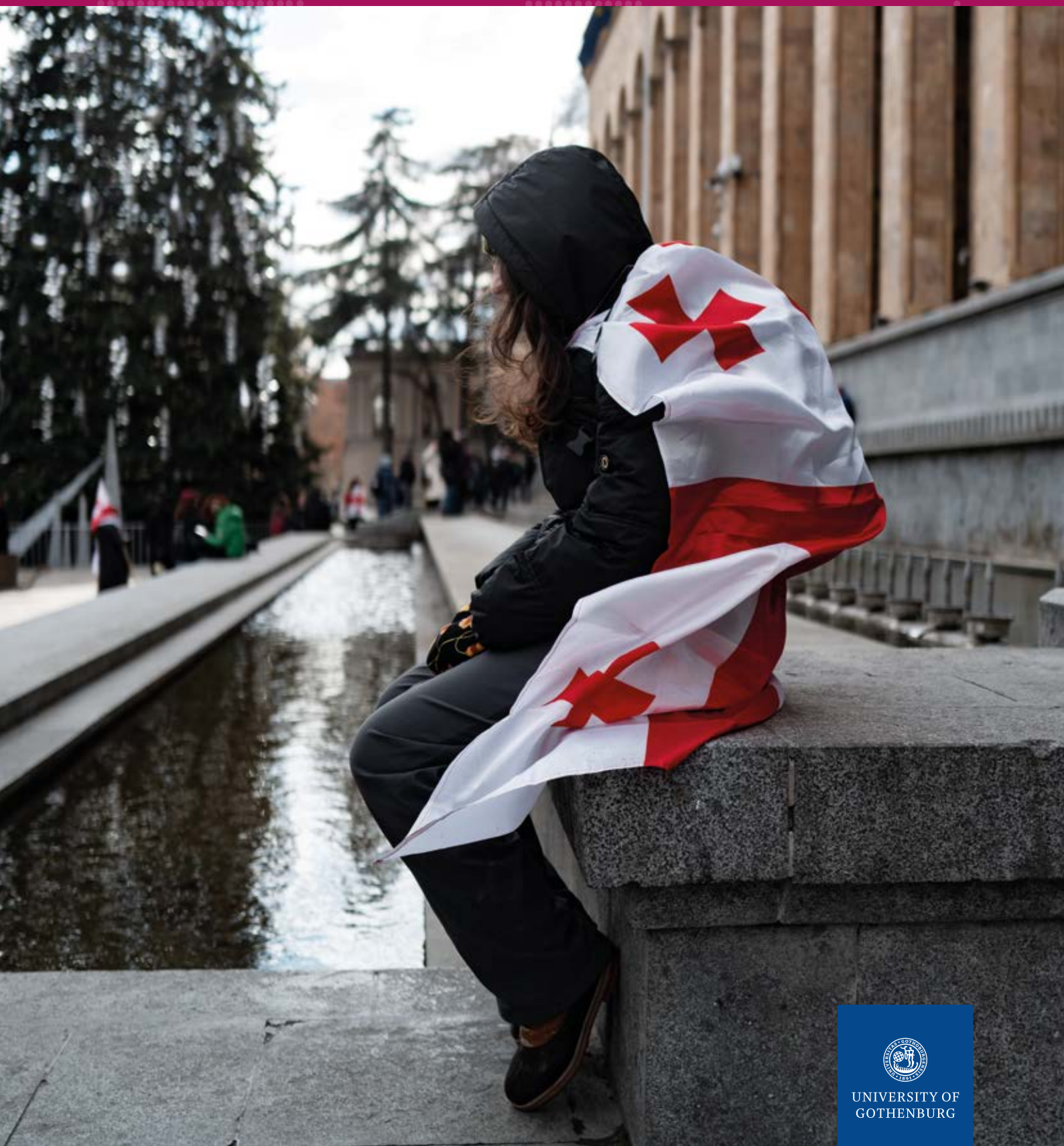
V-Dem INSTITUTE

DEMOCRACY REPORT 2025

25 Years of Autocratization – Democracy Trumped?



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Democracy Report Author Team: Fabio Angiolillo (Postdoctoral Researcher), Ana Good God (Assistant Researcher), Marina Nord (Postdoctoral Researcher), and Staffan I. Lindberg (Director & Professor).
Spanish edition: David Altman (Professor).
Portuguese edition: Tiago Fernandes (Professor).

Production Team: Susanna Burmeister (Administrator & Finance Assistant), Sara Haug Andersson (Communications Officer), and Staffan I. Lindberg (Director & Professor).

Editor: Staffan I. Lindberg
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V-Dem Institute:
Department of Political Science
University of Gothenburg
Gothenburg, Sweden
contact@v-dem.net
+46 (0) 31 786 30 43

www.v-dem.net

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ALL WORKING TOGETHER TO PRODUCE

31,000,000

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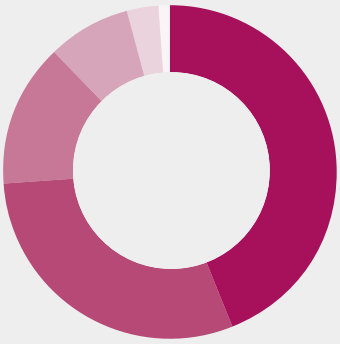

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A Word from the Authors

WE ARE PLEASED TO PRESENT the 9th annual *Democracy Report 2025: 25 Years of Autocratization – Democracy Trumped?* When we were finishing up the last touches on the *Democracy Report* three years ago, Russia launched its full-scale, illegal invasion of Ukraine. The war is still going on. But back then, the alliance backing this young, aspiring democracy was solid and included the United States of America.

AS WE ARE finishing up this year's *Democracy Report*, recently inaugurated President Trump is voting against NATO allies in the UN joining with autocracies like North Korea, Russia, and Sudan. Military support to Ukraine was just cut off, and the words coming out of the Trump administration echo Kremlin rhetoric. European leaders are scrambling to mount a sufficient response. The world is going through another convulsion.

THE 2025 REPORT unfortunately finds no signs of the third wave of autocratization cresting or even slowing down. No matter how we slice the data and look at it from different perspectives using different metrics, the overall trend of worsening, stands. Looking towards the future, there are at least seven more countries on the "Watchlist" to become autocratizers, including Cyprus, Slovakia, and Slovenia in Europe. Equally if not more worrying, it seems clear that the actions the Trump administration is taking domestically amount to an ongoing attempt steering towards democratic breakdown. As the group of authors, we hope that you will find the *Democracy Report 2025* useful.

IN A MONTH or so, both Spanish and Portuguese editions will be released, thanks to Professor David Altman, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and the Regional Center for Latin America, and Professor Tiago Fernandes, University Institute of Lisbon (ISCTE) and the Regional Center for Southern Europe.

Marina Nord, David Altman, Fabio Angiolillo, Tiago Fernandes, Ana Good God, and Staffan I. Lindberg

A Word from the (outgoing) Director

THE TIME HAS COME for me to take the next step in my professional career. Staying committed to the case for democracy that I have dedicated myself full heartedly to during the last 25 years, I want to spend more time on research that is relevant for policy and practice, and strengthen research communication, outreach, and policy advice.

DURING THE COMING YEAR, the V-Dem Institute at the University of Gothenburg will come under the leadership of a new director. In the interim, Josefine Pernes is Acting Deputy Director of the institute's core activities as an infrastructure producing the V-Dem dataset. We are fortunate to have a highly experienced, competent, and resourceful team, supported by an engaged and supportive international network and V-Dem's Steering Committee, during this transition process. I naturally remain one of the funding Principal Investigators of the V-Dem project, and I will remain member of the V-Dem Institute's Steering Committee.

WITH THIS FURTHER development I will be able to focus on a new aim: to build a *V-Dem Center for Democracy Policy Research* that would bring together and house to build further on that type of work I have led and developed, including: the annual *Democracy Report*; research-based *policy briefs*; initiatives such as the *Case for Democracy*; thematic work like the *Clean Elections Report*; and policy-relevant research that I've led developing *Episodes of Regime Transformation*; the *Varieties of Autocratization* work that also developed the *V-Party data set*; the *Forecasting of Regime Changes*; and so on. With tasks and responsibilities concentrated in different branches, I hope the future will bring even more high-quality outputs.

Professor Staffan I. Lindberg,
Founding Director of the V-Dem Institute 2014–2025

The Democracy Report 2025 will soon be available in Spanish and Portuguese

Spanish Version:

Translation and Production by V-Dem Regional Center in Latin America, led by Professor David Altman.

Portuguese Version:

Translation and Production by V-Dem Regional Center in Southern Europe, led by Associate Professor Tiago Fernandes.

Executive Summary

1. Democracy in the World 2024

- Level of democracy for the average world citizen is back to 1985; by country averages, it is back to 1996.
- Democracy is losing out the most in terms of economic power. It is at its lowest level in over 50 years.
- It is a truly global wave of autocratization. Eastern Europe and South and Central Asia are in particularly steep decline.

Autocracies and Democracies

- The world has fewer democracies (*N*=88) than autocracies (*N*=91) for the first time in over 20 years.
- Liberal democracies have become the least common regime type in the world, a total of 29 in 2024.
- Nearly 3 out of 4 persons in the world – 72% – now live in autocracies. This is the highest since 1978.

Alarming Loss of Freedom of Expression

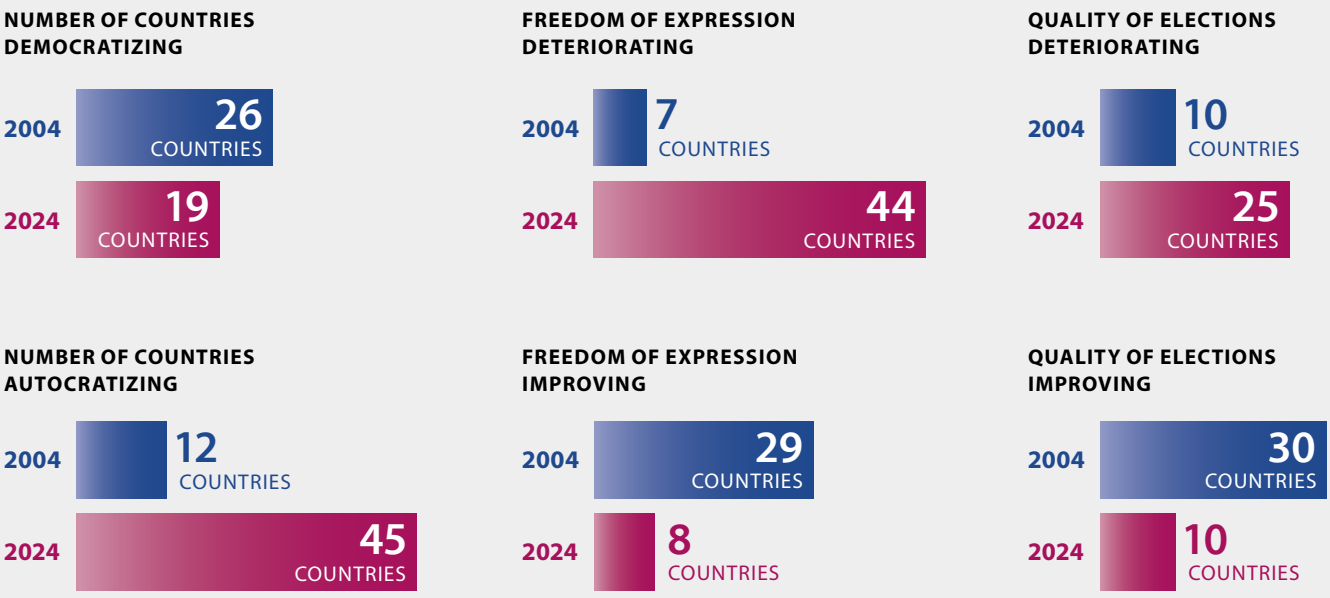
- Losses in freedom of expression are alarming: Worsening in 44 countries by 2024, up from 35 in last year's report.
- Clean elections declining in 25, freedom of association in 22, and rule of law in 18 countries.

2. Trends of Regime Transformation

- The "third wave" of autocratization is still rising after at least 25 years.
- Almost 40% of the world population live in autocratizing countries, 3.1 billion people.
- Countries with less than 6% of the world population – or 452 million – are democratizing. Two-thirds live in three countries: Brazil, Poland, and Thailand.

3. Autocratizing Countries

- An increasing number of countries – now 45 – are autocratizing.
- 27 of the 45 autocratizers were democracies at the start of their episode. Of these, only 9 remain democracies in 2024. The fatality rate is 67%.
- The favorite weapon of autocratizers is media censorship, followed by undermining elections and civil society.



4. Democratizing Countries

- 19 countries are in episodes of democratization.
- 12 of the 19 democratizers started as autocracies. 9 of these transitioned to democracy. The "success rate" is 75%.
- Freedom of expression improve most often during democratization, closely followed by rule of law and executive oversight.

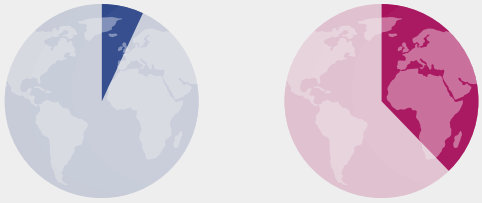
5. The 2024 "Year of Elections" in Review

- The 2024 year of elections overall did neither "break" nor "make" it for democracy. The global trend remains largely unchanged.
- Out of 61 countries holding elections, only 11 countries changed their trajectories.
- Overall, there were slightly more countries with negative (7) than positive (4) changes of trajectories.
- Increasing political violence and pro-democracy mobilization are the most visible trends of the 2024 year of elections.

6. Democracy Report 2025 Watchlist

- 7 countries enter the *Democracy Report* "Watchlist" as potential autocratizers – very close to qualify as manifest autocratizers.
- 3 countries are on the *Democracy Report* "Watchlist" as potential democratizers.

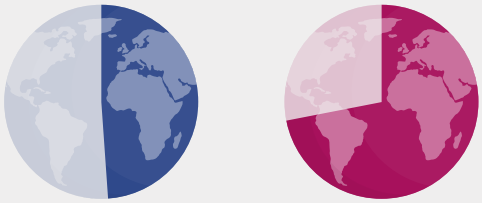
SHARE OF WORLD POPULATION LIVING IN AUTOCRATIZING COUNTRIES



2004: 7%

2024: 38%

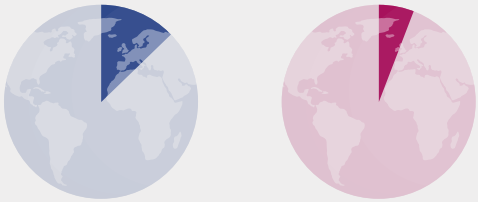
SHARE OF WORLD POPULATION LIVING IN AUTOCRACIES



2004: 49%

2024: 72%

SHARE OF WORLD POPULATION LIVING IN DEMOCRATIZING COUNTRIES



2004: 13%

2024: 6%

SHARE OF WORLD POPULATION LIVING IN DEMOCRACIES

2004: 51%

2024: 28%

Hundreds of university students gather in Yeouido, South Korea, on December 7, 2024, holding placards demanding the impeachment and resignation of President Yoon Suk Yeol, accused of treason after his failed attempt to declare martial law. (Chris Jung/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

1 | Democracy in the World 2024

- **Level of democracy for the average world citizen is back to 1985; by country averages, it is back to 1996.**
- **Democracy is losing out the most in terms of economic power: It is at its lowest level in over 50 years.**
- **It is a truly global wave of autocratization. Eastern Europe and South and Central Asia are in particularly steep decline. North America and Western Europe are also no longer immune: The level of democracy in this region is back to 1983 by country averages.**
- **The world now has 88 democracies (liberal and electoral) and 91 autocracies (electoral and closed) – a full reversal from the last year.**
- **Liberal democracies have become the least common regime type in the world, a total of 29 in 2024. Nearly 3 out of 4 persons in the world – 72% – now live in autocracies.**
- **Attacks on freedom of expression continue at an alarming pace: Worsening in 44 countries by 2024, up from 35 in 2023.**

Box 1. Democracy

V-Dem's unique approach to conceptualizing and measuring democracy distinguishes between multiple core principles of democracy: electoral, liberal, majoritarian, consensual, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian.

The principle of electoral democracy is a necessary core for any type of democracy at the national level. Electoral democracy exists when elections are free, fair, and reoccurring; elected officials wield political power de facto; suffrage is universal; political parties and candidates can form freely and compete; and the environment around elections make for a reasonably level playing field with speech, media, and civil society freedom.

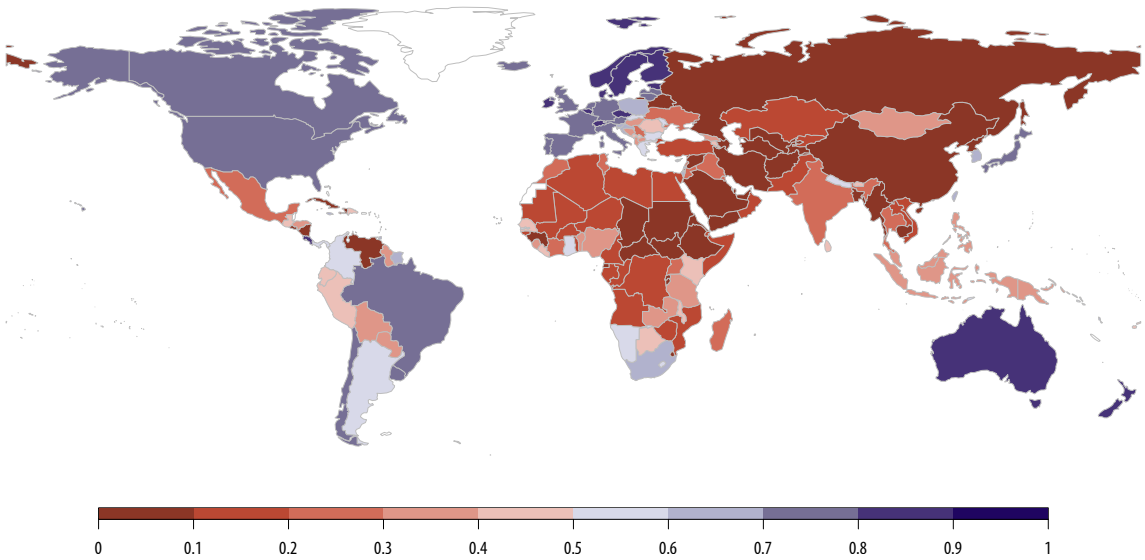
In the *Democracy Report*, analyses mostly use the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI). It combines the above "core" institutions of electoral democracy with the liberal dimension: constraints on the executive by the legislature and the judiciary, and the rule of law ensuring respect for civil liberties.

The sole responsibility for the contents and interpretations in the *Democracy Report* is with its authors.

The outlook on the world at the end of 2024 is worse than in the last 25 years. As we detail and discuss below, the trend of the "third wave of autocratization"[1] is deepening and spreading. That includes weakening of democracy in some established liberal democracies, breakdown of democracy in countries that were democratic for most of the 21st century, as well as deepening of autocracy in already autocratic states. The world map in Figure 1 depicts the state of democracy in 2024 based on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI)[2].

By the end of 2024, higher levels of democracy are more common in Western Europe and North America, as well as in some parts of East Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe, and South America. The Middle East and North Africa, South and Central Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa are dominated by more autocratic countries.

FIGURE 1. STATE OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY (LDI), 2024



1 Lührmann, A. and S.I. Lindberg. 2019. "A Third Wave of Autocratization Is Here: What Is New About It?" *Democratization* 26(7).

2 The *Democracy Report 2025* is based on V-Dem dataset v15. Each year, V-Dem improves the quality of the data, engages more experts, and recalculates the entire dataset covering all years. This leads to correction of scores reported in previous years' reports. V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) captures both electoral and liberal aspects of democracy and goes from the lowest (0) to the highest (1) levels of democracy. The electoral component is measured by the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) that captures the extent to which all elements of Robert Dahl's (1971) famous articulation of "polyarchy" are present: the quality of elections, individual rights, as well as freedoms of expression, the media, and association (Dahl, R. 1971. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press). The Liberal Component Index (LCI) captures checks and balances on the executive, respect for civil liberties, the rule of law, and the independence of the legislature and the judiciary.

Global Democratic Decline Deepens

The global democratic decline deepens, regardless of how we slice the data and whichever measure we use. The unchanged direction of decline across the world makes the situation undeniable, maybe even to previously skeptical observers.

Figure 2 shows the developments over the past 50 years. The decline over the past 15 to 25 years seems to deepen regardless of which of the four measures we look at: **country-based averages** (Panel A), **population-weighted** (Panel B), **territory-weighted** (Panel C), and **GDP-weighted** (Panel D) averages. The red lines in Figure 2 trace the 2024-level of democracy back in time for each measure.

The 2024 level of democracy is back to 1996, by **country-based averages** (Panel A). The drop may seem moderate but corresponds to an almost 10% drop from the 2012-level. Thus, even by "crude" country-based averages, the world is in a substantial decline on democracy that shows no sign of slowing down.

The level of democracy enjoyed by the average global person in 2024 is at levels last registered in 1985 (Panel B). By **population-weighted averages** the level of democracy has not changed much since the last year, and in these dire times for democracy, we interpret it as a positive sign. Yet, it also means that we are still back to the level last seen before the end of the Cold War.

India is only part of the explanation of this decline. If we remove India from the dataset, the population-weighted level of democracy in the "world excluding India" is back to 1990.

Notably, out of the five countries with the largest populations – China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, and the USA – only the latter remains a democracy. With the current developments in the USA under the Trump administration, even that country's democracy seems to be in jeopardy (see Box 9).

The level of democracy by **territory-weighted averages** is now back to the level last seen in 1986 (Panel C). Together, panels B and C show that the global wave of autocratization that has been unfolding during the past 25 to 30 years has affected many large and populous countries.

The **GDP-weighted** level of democracy presents the gloomiest picture out of the four graphs in Figure 2 (Panel D). It has been in decline for 25 years, and is far below the 1974-level, thus is at its lowest level in over 50 years. This reflects a joint effect of both the global decline in democracy and the rising economic power of autocratic states, such as China. Yet, China's remarkable economic growth is only one part of the story. When we remove China from the dataset, the GDP-weighted level of democracy in the "world excluding China" is back to 1980.

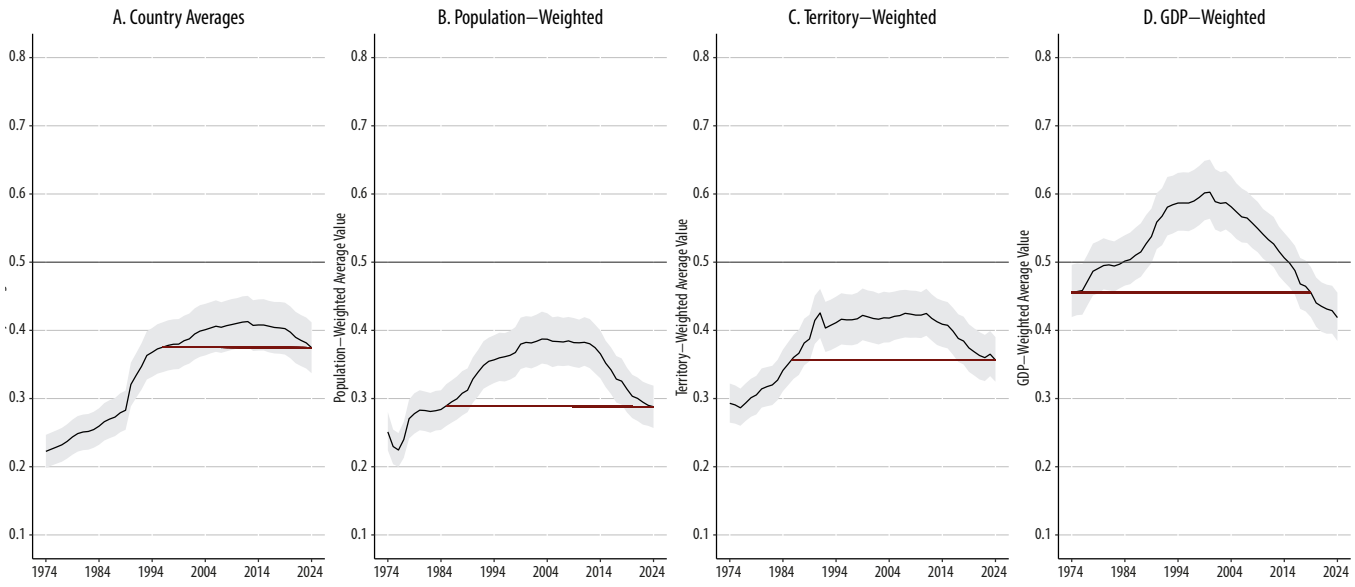
In sum, larger, more populous and economically powerful countries drive much of autocratization in the world. Many of these countries are influential on neighbors, in international organizations, multilateral cooperations, trade and investments, and much more.

That means that the world is affected by the wave of autocratization much more in many respects, than it would be if autocratizing countries were small and less powerful.

DEMOCRATIC DECLINES ACROSS REGIONS

The democratic decline over the past 25 year has global reach. Yet, the extent of the decline is uneven across regions. **Eastern Europe**, including the Balkans and Caucasus, were much more democratic back then and autocracy has taken hold or strengthened in countries like Belarus, Hungary, Russia, and Serbia. **South and Central Asia** recently lost two democracies – India and Mongolia, while autocracy has tightened and become substantially more severe in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan. Democratic weakening is also happening in some liberal democracies across **Latin America**, and **Western Europe and North America**, including the United States of America (USA).

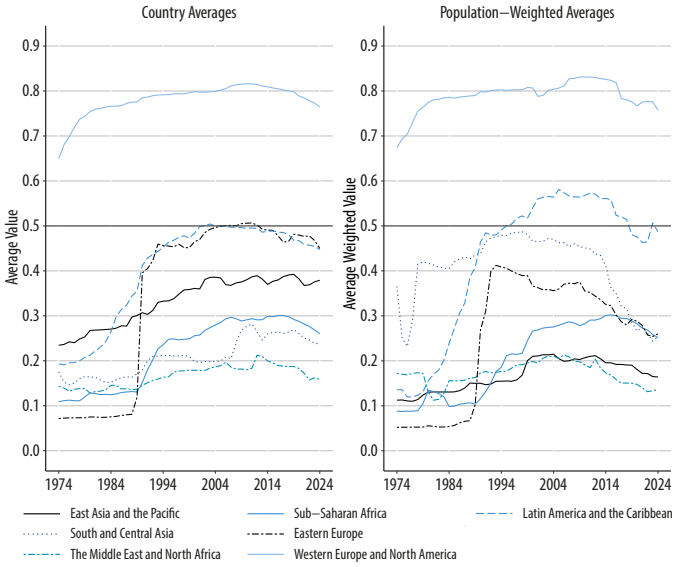
FIGURE 2. LIBERAL DEMOCRACY BY COUNTRY AVERAGES, POPULATION, TERRITORY, AND GDP WEIGHTS, 1974–2024



The black lines represent global averages on the LDI with the grey area marking the confidence intervals. Panel A is based on conventional country averages. Panels B, C, and D show global levels of democracy weighted by population, territory, and GDP, respectively. The data for the latter three panels are drawn from the World Bank WDI dataset and Fariss et al. 2022.[3] Both are included in the V-Dem dataset v15.

3 Fariss et al. 2022 "New Estimates of Over 500 Years of Historic GDP and Population Data". *Journal of Conflict Resolution 66(3).*

FIGURE 3. LIBERAL DEMOCRACY BY COUNTRY AVERAGES AND POPULATION WEIGHTS, 1974–2024



The lines are regional averages on the LDI. Panel A is based on conventional country averages. Panel B shows levels of democracy weighted by population size using data from the World Bank, included in the V-Dem dataset v15.

Figure 3 shows the variation in the magnitude of democratic decline across regions of the world by country-based averages (left panel) and adjusted for the population size (right panel). It shows differences in levels across the regions, but also variation in declines which we detail below.

In **Eastern Europe**, including the Balkans and the Caucasus, the levels of democracy are *much* lower when accounting for population size, than by the country-based averages. Larger countries with big populations are particularly hard hit by autocratization in this region. Belarus and Russia are prominent examples registering substantial declines since the 1990s and turning into unyielding authoritarian regimes. Last year, Belarus became the first and the only closed autocracy in Eastern Europe. Other populous countries driving the decline include Hungary, Romania, Serbia, and war-torn Ukraine.

The decline in population-weighted democracy levels in **South and Central Asia** is equally steep and worrisome. This region harbors two billion people, and the level of democracy enjoyed by an average citizen living in this region is back to the 1975-level. The decline is largely driven by India that harbors 1.4 billion people. Yet, other populous countries are also autocratizing, and some at a rapid speed such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region in the world that scores substantially higher on its population-weighted average than on its country-based averages. In this region, large and populous countries are, on average, *more* democratic than smaller ones. The region registers a moderate decline on democracy levels when looking at the country-averages. By population-weighted averages, however, there was a steep decline during the last decade largely due to the autocratization processes in Brazil. The small but noticeable uptick in 2022–2023 registers the U-turn process in Brazil (see Section 4), while the subsequent reversal in 2024 is mostly the result of ongoing autocratization processes in Mexico and, most recently, Argentina and Peru.

The **Western Europe and North America**-region is not immune to the global autocratization trend. The persistent decline over the past few years – even if it is gradual and, in many countries, still moderate – starts adding up. By country averages, the level of democracy in this region is back to 1983. There are also first signs of worrisome trends in Cyprus, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, and the USA. The USA has already registered a substantial (0.1) and statistically significant decline on the LDI, compared to its 2014 level (see Figure A7 in Appendix), while other countries have statistically significant negative changes on several of the indicators that go into the LDI, and the overall trends are therefore real to that extent.[4] Greece is registered as a statistically confirmed autocratizer and its decline is steep (see Section 3). The overall regional decline is steeper in the population-weighted average than in the country-average, largely driven by the declines in more populous countries like Greece, Italy, and the USA.

A special note is warranted on the **USA**. The last point of measure for the V-Dem data in the current version 15 is 31st December 2024. While the election in the USA was held on 4th of November 2024, President Trump did not assume office until 20th January 2025. While there were certainly some aspects of democracy in the USA taking a toll already during 2024, recent and extremely worrying developments are not captured by the V-Dem data yet. They will be reflected in the V-Dem data only next year. For a review of the ways in which democracy is derailed in the USA as we write, see Box 9.

In **The Middle East and North Africa (MENA)** region, the decline has been gradual, but substantial. By country-based averages, the region is back to 1993-level, while by population-weighted averages it has been balancing around its early 1980s-levels for almost a decade. The decline in democracy levels in this region was largely driven by autocratization in Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, Türkiye, and war-torn Yemen. It remains the region with the lowest democracy levels in the world for over 15 years, by both measures.

Democracy levels in **Sub-Saharan Africa** have declined in past years by both measures in almost equal degree – the region is now back to its 2000-level. The declines are driven in part by a series of coups in the Sahel region from 2020 to 2023 as well as by increasingly authoritarian rule in already autocratic countries like Central African Republic, The Comoros, Mozambique, and Togo. In addition, declines in some of the more democratic countries like Benin, Botswana, and Ghana contribute to the ongoing trend of autocratization.

Box 2. Why Population-Weighted Measures?

Since democracy is *rule by the people*, it arguably matters how many people enjoy democratic rights and freedoms around the world. The population-weighted measures that we often use in the *Democracy Report*, are therefore more indicative of 'how much' of the world lives in a democracy than simple averages across countries. Country-averages give the same weight to advances in a small country like The Seychelles (one of the top performers) as to declines in a huge country like India (one of the worst autocratizers lately). When speaking of how much of the world is undergoing a democratic decline, we, the authors of the *Democracy Report*, do not think that advances in a small country compensate for declines in a large one. This is why we focus more on population-weighted measures while also reporting the averages that give equal weight to all countries.

4 By magnitude of change on the EDI, Cyprus, Italy, Netherlands and Portugal are at the top (after Greece) with concerning >.05 declines making them "near misses" approaching the .10 threshold to qualify as a confirmed autocratizer (see Section 6).

In **East Asia and the Pacific**, democracy is wobbling up and down a little bit from year to year with small increases in democracy in 2023 and 2024, by country-based averages. This relative stability, however, does not translate into the population-weighted averages. On that measure, the region has always been much less democratic, and there is a steady downward trend for the region. Smaller countries like Fiji and Malaysia have improved on the LDI levels during the last years, while larger countries such as Indonesia and The Philippines continue to decline.

Autocracies and Democracies

- **The world now has 88 democracies (liberal and electoral) and 91 autocracies (electoral and closed) – a full reversal from last year.**
- **Liberal democracies have become the least common regime type in the world, a total of 29 in 2024.**
- **Liberal democracies host less than 12% of the world population – 0.9 billion – the lowest in 50 years.**
- **Nearly 3 out of 4 persons in the world – 72% – now live in autocracies. This is the highest since 1978.**
- **Belarus descends to closed autocracy, becoming the first closed autocracy in Europe in 25 years.**

Autocracies are now in a majority in the world. By the Regimes of the World (RoW) measure, the world now has 88 democracies (liberal and electoral) and 91 autocracies (electoral and closed). This is a full reversal from last year, when it was the other way around. 2024 marks the first time since 2002 when there are more autocracies than democracies in the world. This is a stark reminder of how far the democratic decline has gone.

Figure 4 (left panel) provides the detailed count of countries in each regime category over the past 50 years using the Regimes of the World (RoW) measure. The fourfold RoW categorization provides a simplified lens capturing some broader global trends in terms of autocracy and democracy.

FIGURE 4. REGIME TYPES BY NUMBER OF COUNTRIES, 1974–2024

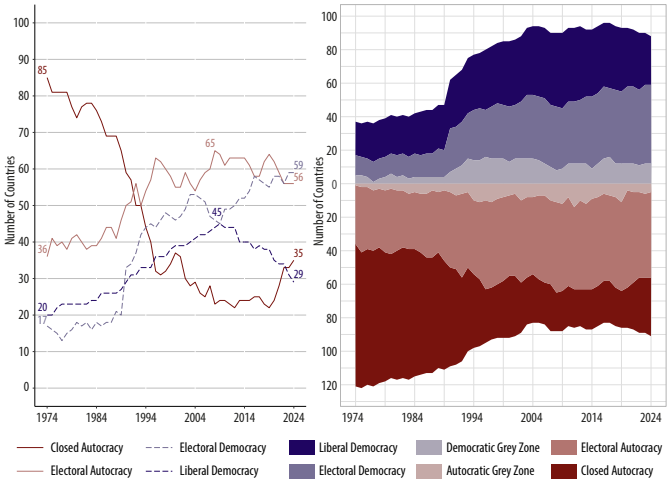


Figure 4 plots the share of the world's population (left panel) by regime type. The right panel takes into account measurement uncertainty, highlighting the number of "grey zone" countries above or below the line, distinguishing between democracies and autocracies.

One side of the wave of autocratization is depicted in the left panel: Already authoritarian countries are becoming even more autocratic. The number of **closed autocracies** has been increasing since 2019 – from 22 to 35 at present. During the last year alone, Belarus, Gabon, Lebanon, and Niger descended from electoral to closed autocracies. The fact that the number of **electoral autocracies** has been decreasing from 64 in 2019 to 56 by 2024 should therefore not be misinterpreted as good news.

The other, and equally worrying, side of the global wave of autocratization is that democracies are becoming less democratic.

Women gathered in a protest. (Pixabay)

Liberal democracies are now the least common regime type in the world after gradually decreasing in numbers since 2009. The last time there were only 29 liberal democracies in the world was in 1990 – at the end of the Cold War.

The gradual rise in the number of **electoral democracies** reflects that countries who used to be liberal democracies have suffered from backsliding and have lost some of the liberal features. Some recent examples include Botswana, Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and Slovenia.

The two sides of the same coin show that the wave of autocratization affects both democracies and autocracies. Over the last decade, the quality of democracy in democracies has declined, while the severity of authoritarianism in autocracies has increased – a growth in the "worst of both worlds."

"GREY ZONE" COUNTRIES

The dividing line between electoral autocracies and electoral democracies deserves a special note. Categorical classifications like the RoW measure sacrifice some nuances and risk misclassifying countries when the underlying data puts them at, or very close to, thresholds. Some uncertainty therefore remains about regimes that are close to the threshold between democracy and autocracy.

Figure 4 (right panel) shows that there are some countries where the classification is associated with some level of uncertainty because of the potential for measurement error. They are either in the "lower bound" of electoral democracies (*N*=12) or in the "upper bound" of electoral autocracies (*N*=5). We treat them as **"grey zone" regimes**.

Grey zone electoral democracies include countries like Albania, Kenya, Mexico, and Nigeria. According to the V-Dem data, the best estimate for these countries is that they are electoral democracies, but they may also fall behind the bar for democracy. Some grey zone democracies are now on an upward path – democratizing – such as Fiji, Honduras, and Malaysia and if that continues their classification would become certain.

The five grey zone electoral autocracies that could potentially be misclassified are Benin, Guyana, Indonesia, Mauritius, and Mongolia. According to the V-Dem data, the best estimate is that these countries no longer qualify for the minimum standards of electoral democracy. All of them except Benin are in episodes of autocratization but Mauritius held a surprising election in 2024 that could mean a turnaround after years of autocratization (see Section 5).

Overall, taking the grey zone uncertainty into account, the number of democracies could range from 76 to 93, with 88 being our best estimate, while the number of autocracies might range from 86 to 103 countries, with 91 being our best estimate. For details, see Table A1 at the end of the report.

We list all countries' RoW classification with grey zone regimes marked in Table 1, along with information on whether they shifted regime category in 2024, and whether they are in an episode of autocratization or democratization.

Box 3. Regimes of the World – Democratization and Autocratization

Democratization means that a country is making moves towards more democracy, regardless of starting point. **Autocratization** is the opposite as depicted in Figure 1.

Democratization can start in an autocracy (liberalization) or in a democracy (deepening); and inversely, autocratization can start in a democracy (backsliding) or in an autocracy (regression).

We distinguish between four **types of regimes**: Closed and Electoral Autocracies, and Electoral and Liberal Democracies. For this, we use the *Regimes of the World* (RoW) measure (v2x_regime). There is also a version of the RoW measure taking uncertainty into account (v2x_regime_amb). We use the latter to show "grey zone" cases where confidence intervals in the data overlap making the classification more uncertain. The countries found in the grey zone are listed as either upper bound electoral autocracies ("EA+") or as lower bound electoral democracies ("ED-") in Table 1.

RoW builds on V-Dem data as well as V-Dem's liberal and electoral democracy indices, but is an index created by its authors (just like many indices in the V-Dem dataset).

For details, see Lührmann et al. 2018. "Regimes of the World (RoW)". *Politics and Governance* 6(1). Open access.

FIGURE 1. REGIMES AND REGIME CHANGE

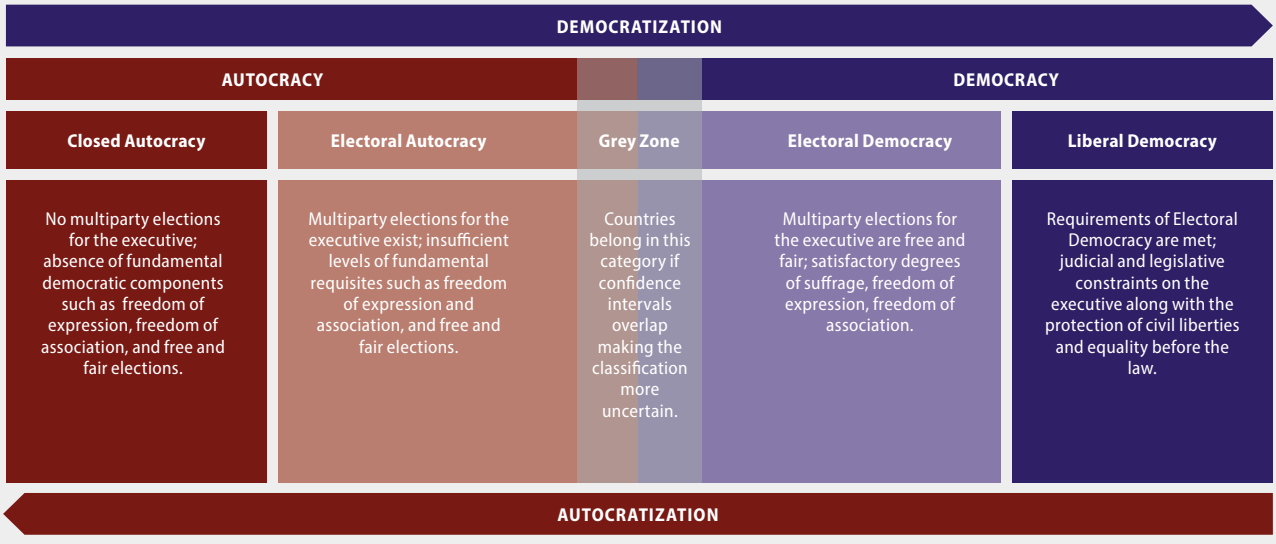

DEMOCRATIZATION
AUTOCRACY
DEMOCRACY
Closed Autocracy
Electoral Autocracy
Grey Zone
Electoral Democracy
Liberal Democracy
No multiparty elections for the executive; absence of fundamental democratic components such as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and free and fair elections.
Multiparty elections for the executive exist; insufficient levels of fundamental requisites such as freedom of expression and association, and free and fair elections.
Countries belong in this category if confidence intervals overlap making the classification more uncertain.
Multiparty elections for the executive are free and fair; satisfactory degrees of suffrage, freedom of expression, freedom of association.
Requirements of Electoral Democracy are met; judicial and legislative constraints on the executive along with the protection of civil liberties and equality before the law.
AUTOCRATIZATION

TABLE 1. REGIMES OF THE WORLD, 2024

Table 1 presents the classification of countries according to the Regimes of the World measure. Countries are sorted by regime type in 2024, and within regime type – in alphabetical order.

We use the plus/minus sign to indicate the possible uncertainty of the classification, and to underline that some countries are placed in the "grey zone" between regime types. This is based on the V-Dem's confidence intervals and accounts for potential measurement errors that may arise due to the nature of the data.

The typology is published in Lührmann et al. 2018. Regimes of the World (RoW), Politics and Governance 6(1). While based on the V-Dem's data, this measure is not officially endorsed by the Steering Committee of V-Dem (only the main V-Dem democracy indices have such an endorsement).

LD Liberal Democracy
ED Electoral Democracy
EA Electoral Autocracy
CA Closed Autocracy
– indicates that the country could also belong to the lower category
+ indicates that the country could also belong to the higher category
↑ ↓ indicates a country moving from one category to another
↘ In an episode of autocratization, as of 2024
↗ In an episode of democratization, as of 2024
Grey zone democracies/autocracies are marked

LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

COUNTRY	2024	1 YEAR CHANGE	ERT EPISODE BY 2024
Australia	LD		
Belgium	LD		
Costa Rica	LD		
Czechia	LD		
Denmark	LD		
Estonia	LD		
Finland	LD		
Germany	LD		
Iceland	LD		
Ireland	LD		
Japan	LD		
Latvia	LD		
Luxembourg	LD		
New Zealand	LD		
Norway	LD		
Seychelles	LD		↗
Spain	LD		
Sweden	LD		
Switzerland	LD		
Taiwan	LD		
USA	LD		
Barbados	LD-		
Chile	LD-		
France	LD-		
Italy	LD-		
Jamaica	LD-	↑	
Netherlands	LD-		
South Africa	LD-	↑	
Uruguay	LD-		

ELECTORAL DEMOCRACIES

COUNTRY	2024	1 YEAR CHANGE	ERT EPISODE BY 2024
Austria	ED+		
Bhutan	ED+	↓	
Botswana	ED+		
Canada	ED+		
Cyprus	ED+		
Gambia	ED+		↗
Greece	ED+		↘
Israel	ED+		
Lithuania	ED+		
Malta	ED+		
Montenegro	ED+		↗
Portugal	ED+		
Slovenia	ED+		
South Korea	ED+	↓	↘
Trinidad and Tobago	ED+		
United Kingdom	ED+	↓	
Vanuatu	ED+		
Argentina	ED		↘
Armenia	ED		↘
Bolivia	ED		↗
Brazil	ED		↗
Bulgaria	ED		
Cape Verde	ED		
Colombia	ED		
Croatia	ED		
Dominican Republic	ED		↗
Ecuador	ED		↗
Ghana	ED		
Guatemala	ED		
Kosovo	ED		
Lesotho	ED		↗
Liberia	ED		
Malawi	ED		
Maldives	ED		↗
Nepal	ED		
Panama	ED		
Paraguay	ED		
Peru	ED		↘
Poland	ED		↗
Romania	ED		↘
S.Tomé & P.	ED		
Senegal	ED		↘
Slovakia	ED		
Solomon Islands	ED		↗
Sri Lanka	ED		↗
Suriname	ED	↓	
Timor-Leste	ED		↗
Albania	ED-		
BiH	ED-		
Fiji	ED-		↗
Honduras	ED-		↗
Kenya	ED-		
Malaysia	ED-		
Mexico	ED-		↘
Moldova	ED-		↘
Namibia	ED-		
Nigeria	ED-	↑	
North Macedonia	ED-		
Zambia	ED-		↗

ELECTORAL AUTOCRACIES

COUNTRY	2024	1 YEAR CHANGE	ERT EPISODE BY 2024
Benin	EA+		↗
Guyana	EA+		↘
Indonesia	EA+	↓	↘
Mauritius	EA+		↘
Mongolia	EA+	↓	↘
Algeria	EA		
Angola	EA		
Azerbaijan	EA		
Bangladesh	EA		↘
Burundi	EA		
CAR	EA		↘
Cambodia	EA		
Cameroon	EA		
Chad	EA	↑	
Comoros	EA		↘
Congo	EA		
DRC	EA		
Djibouti	EA		
Egypt	EA		
El Salvador	EA		↘
Equatorial Guinea	EA		
Ethiopia	EA		
Georgia	EA	↓	↘
Guinea-Bissau	EA		↘
Hungary	EA		↘
India	EA		↘
Iran	EA	↑	
Iraq	EA		
Ivory Coast	EA		↘
Kazakhstan	EA		
Kyrgyzstan	EA		↘
Madagascar	EA		
Mauritania	EA		↘
Mozambique	EA		↘
Pakistan	EA		↘
Palestine/West Bank	EA		
Papua New Guinea	EA		
Philippines	EA		↘
Russia	EA		
Rwanda	EA		
Serbia	EA		↘
Sierra Leone	EA		↘
Singapore	EA		
Somaliland	EA		
Tajikistan	EA		
Tanzania	EA		↘
Thailand	EA		↗
Togo	EA		
Tunisia	EA		↗
Türkiye	EA		
Uganda	EA		
Ukraine	EA		↘
Venezuela	EA		
Zanzibar	EA		
Zimbabwe	EA		
Nicaragua	EA-		↘

CLOSED AUTOCRACIES

COUNTRY	2024	1 YEAR CHANGE	ERT EPISODE BY 2024
Kuwait	CA+		
Turkmenistan	CA+		
Uzbekistan	CA+		
Afghanistan	CA		↘
Bahrain	CA		
Belarus	CA	↓	↘
Burkina Faso	CA		↘
China	CA		
Cuba	CA		
Eritrea	CA		
Eswatini	CA		
Gabon	CA	↓	↘
Guinea	CA		↘
Haiti	CA		↘
Hong Kong	CA		↘
Jordan	CA		
Laos	CA		
Lebanon	CA	↓	↘
Libya	CA		↘
Mali	CA		↘
Morocco	CA		
Myanmar	CA		↘
Niger	CA	↓	↘
North Korea	CA		
Oman	CA		
Palestine/Gaza	CA		
Qatar	CA		
Saudi Arabia	CA		
Somalia	CA		
South Sudan	CA		
Sudan	CA		↘
Syria	CA		
UAE	CA		
Vietnam	CA		
Yemen	CA		

FEWEST IN 50 YEARS LIVE IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

Nearly three quarters of the world population – 72% – now live in autocracies (see Figure 5). This is a new record since 1978 also in terms of people: 5.8 billion people.

Liberal democracies now host less than 12% of the world population, or 0.9 billion, which is the lowest in 50 years. Behind this, there is both the decline in the total number of liberal democracies and the slow population growth rate in them.

Electoral democracies are home to only 17% of the world population, by the end of 2024. The three most populous countries are Brazil, Mexico, and Nigeria with some caution for Mexico and Nigeria that are in the grey zone area.

The share of the world population living in electoral democracies sharply declined in 2017, when India's episode of autocratization led to a descent into electoral autocracy. From 2015 to 2018, there was still some uncertainty about the classification of India, as depicted in the right panel of Figure 5. India declined to "grey zone" electoral democracy in 2015, moved further down to "grey zone" electoral autocracy in 2017, and descended to confirmed electoral autocracy by 2019 after which there is no uncertainty about India's regime type, according to the V-Dem data.

The most populous type of regime is clearly **electoral autocracies** with 46% of the world population, or 3.7 billion. Some of the world's more populous countries belong to this regime type, such as Ethiopia, India, and Pakistan. Indonesia also descended to this regime type in 2024, although to the autocratic "grey zone" (see Table A1 at the end of the report).

Closed autocracies with large population include China, Myanmar, and Vietnam. This regime type accounts for 26% of the world population, or 2.1 billion people.

REGIONAL VARIATIONS ARE IMMENSE

There is *substantial* variation across regions in the share of the population that resides in democracies or autocracies. Figure 6 shows the situation as of 2024, across seven regions of the world.

FIGURE 5. REGIME TYPES BY SHARE OF WORLD POPULATION, 1974–2024[1]

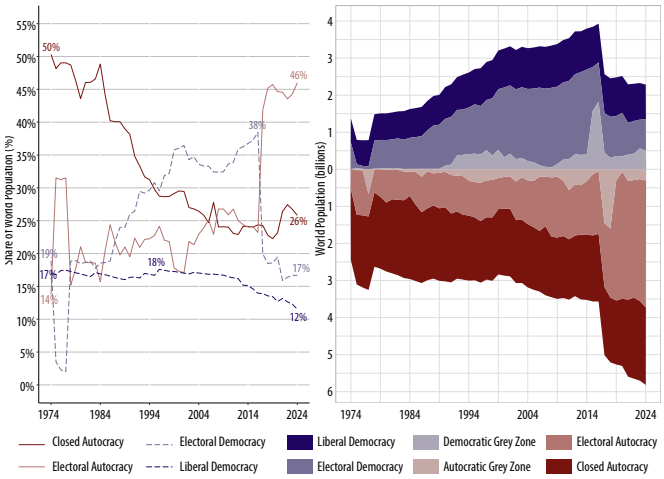


Figure 5 plots the share of the world population (left panel) and size (in billions, right panel) by regime type. The right panel highlights the size of the population living in "grey zone" countries for which the classification as democracies or autocracies is associated with some measurement uncertainty. The "grey zone" estimates are based on the v2x_regime_amb version of the RoW measure (see V-Dem codebook, v15).

1 Percentages are rounded throughout the report, sometimes this leads to totals of 99%or 101%. Population figures come from the World Bank included in the V-Dem dataset, v15.

In **East Asia and the Pacific**, a vast majority – 89% – of the population reside in autocracies and are denied some or all democratic rights and freedoms. This includes 68% living in closed autocracies, such as China and North Korea where basically all rights and freedoms are denied to citizens. It is therefore also the region with – by far – the highest share of its population living in closed autocracies. Another 9% live in electoral autocracies such as Cambodia, The Philippines, and Singapore, while 12% reside in "grey zone" electoral autocracy Indonesia. Notably, Indonesia had been an electoral democracy since 1999 and transcended to the "grey zone" electoral autocracy in 2024. Only 7% of the East Asia and the Pacific population live in liberal democracies, namely in Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and Taiwan. Another 2% live in electoral democracies, and

FIGURE 6. REGIONAL SHARES OF POPULATION BY REGIME TYPE, 2024

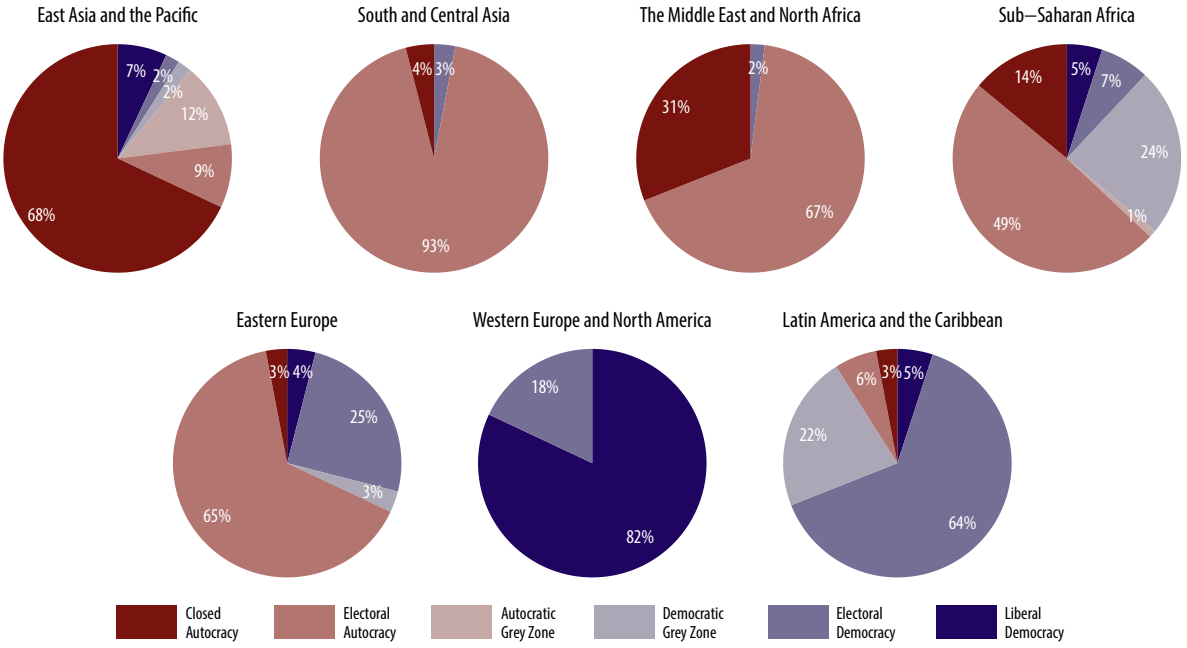


Figure 6 plots the share of population living in liberal democracies, electoral democracies, electoral autocracies, and closed autocracies, including "grey zone" subcategories, by regions of the world.

2% – in "grey zone" electoral democracies, where the uncertainty bounds overlap with thresholds for electoral autocracy.

South and Central Asia is the second most autocratic region in the world, only behind The Middle East and North Africa. More than nine out of ten people, or 93% of the population in this region reside in electoral autocracies, like India or Pakistan. The three closed autocracies – Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – account for 4% of the regional population. A mere 3% reside in electoral democracies, such as The Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

MENA remains the most autocratic region in the world, with 98% of its population residing in autocracies. A large share (31%) lives in closed autocracies such as Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. However, the largest share of the population – 67% – live in electoral autocracies, such as Egypt and Türkiye. The remaining 2% of the region's population reside in Israel, the only country classified as an electoral democracy. Notably, Israel lost its long-time status as liberal democracy in 2023.

In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, most people – 64% – reside in autocracies. Electoral autocracies alone harbor 49% of the region's population, including countries like Cameroon, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Closed autocracies now include Gabon and Niger that were downgraded from electoral to closed autocracies in 2024 (see Table A1 at the end of the report), following coups in 2023 and the refusal to hold or continuous postponement of elections. Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the largest share of the population living in "grey zone" regimes and most – 24% – are found in "grey zone" electoral democracies, such as Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia. 7% live in electoral democracies such as Botswana, The Gambia, and Senegal. There are two liberal democracies in the region, making up 5% of the population – The Seychelles and South Africa. Notably, South Africa regained its status of liberal democracy in 2024. It had been electoral democracy for over a decade.

In **Eastern Europe**, 65% of the region's population live in electoral autocracies, such as Hungary, Russia, and Serbia. Georgia joined the list in 2024, descending from an electoral democracy. Notably, 3% of the population reside in Belarus – the only closed autocracy in Europe and the first one since the beginning of the 21st century. Electoral democracies host 28% of the population, including Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania. Of these, 3% live in the ambiguous "lower bound" electoral democracies – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, and North Macedonia. Only 4% reside in the three liberal democracies Czechia, Estonia, and Latvia.

Western Europe and North America remains the most democratic region of the world, with most of its inhabitants – 82% – living in liberal democracies. The remaining 18% reside in electoral democracies, such as Cyprus, Greece, and Malta.

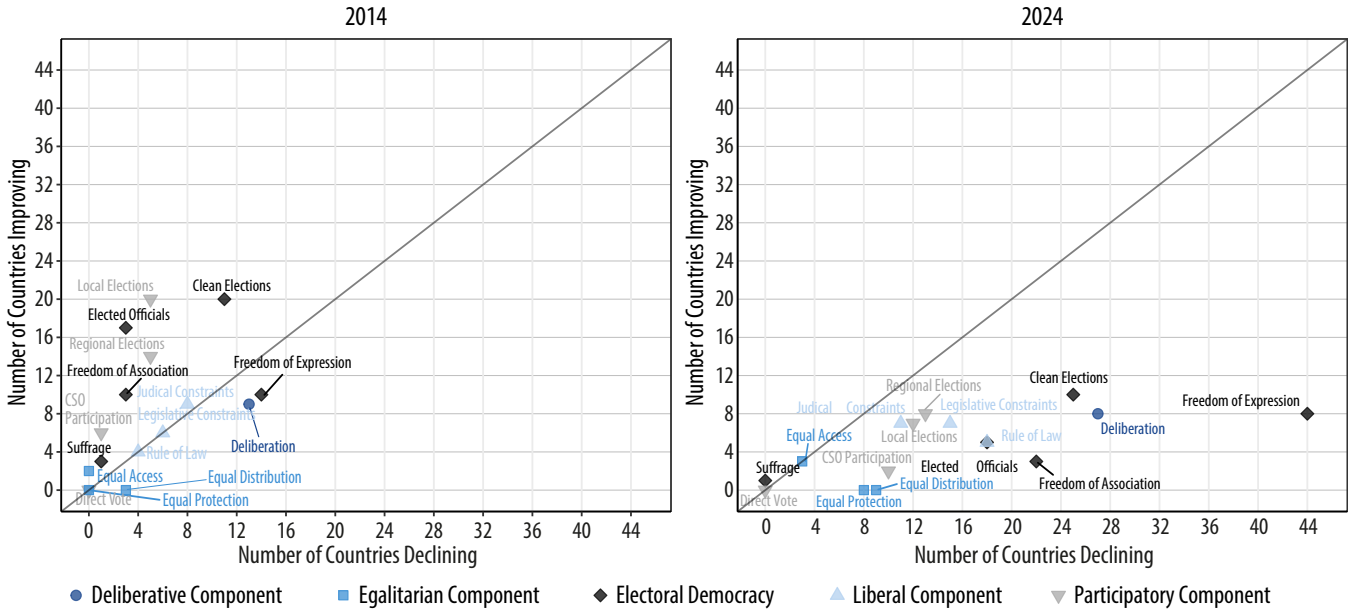
Most of the population in **Latin America and The Caribbean** – 64% – live in electoral democracies, such as Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador. Only 4% live in liberal democracies, such as Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay. No less than 22% of Latin American residents are in the electoral democracy "grey zone". The high percentage is driven by Mexico, which is the second most populous country in the region. Autocracies in the region make up 9% of the region's inhabitants. Among them, Cuba and Haiti are closed autocracies, making up 3%, while El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela are electoral autocracies.

Alarming Loss of Freedom of Expression

- **Almost *all* aspects of democracy are declining in more countries than they are improving, compared to ten years ago.**
- **Losses in freedom of expression are alarming: Worsening in 44 countries by 2024, up from 35 in last year's report.**
- **Deliberative aspect – respectful debate based on facts – deteriorates in 27 countries. That is another sharp worsening compared to last year's reported 19 countries.**
- **Clean elections declining in 25, freedom of association in 22, and rule of law in 18 countries.**

All aspects of democracy are now declining in more countries than they are improving. Two of the components – **freedom of expression** and **deliberation** – were declining already in 2014. In 2024, they declined even further and remain the ones that deteriorated the most – in 44 and 27 countries, respectively.

FIGURE 7. DEMOCRATIC ASPECTS IMPROVING AND DECLINING, 2014 AND 2024



For indices measuring components of democracy, Figure 7 shows the number of countries improving and declining. An index is declining substantially and significantly if its 2024 value is at least 0.05 lower than its 2014 value on a scale ranging from 0 to 1, and the confidence intervals do not overlap. The left panel compares changes between 2014 and 2004, and the right panel compares changes between 2024 and 2014.

Figure 7 provides evidence for how extensive the changes are. The left panel shows the total number of countries in which different aspects of democracy improved or deteriorated by 2014 compared to 2004, and the right panel compares the situation in 2024 to 2014.

For more than a decade, **Freedom of Expression** has been the worst affected aspect of democracy. In 2024, the loss of freedom of expression is truly alarming (Figure 7, right panel). It is deteriorating in 44 countries – *a quarter of all countries in the world*. Not only is this a new record but it is also a substantial increase from 35 countries reported in last year's *Democracy Report*. Conversely, freedom of expression is improving in only eight countries by 2024, while last year's report found that it was still improving in eleven countries.

Deteriorations in Freedom of Expression include declines in various aspects of media freedom, safety of journalists, freedom of citizens to discuss political issues, as well as freedom of academic and cultural expression. Compared to the situation in 2014, the losses are staggering.

Deliberation is the second most affected component of democracy in 2024. It is now deteriorating in 27 countries and improving in only eight. In this year's *Democracy Report*, we register a sharp decline also for the deliberative component, compared to last year. In 2023, 19 countries were declining, while eleven improving. The deliberative component measures aspects such as the extent to which public reasoning is inclusive, and the government has respect for opposition, pluralism, and counterarguments.

The **Clean Elections Index** – a core aspect of democracy – is now declining in 25 countries, while improving in only ten. Compared to ten years ago, the differences are stark. The index was deteriorating in only eleven countries while still improving in 20, back in 2014. The Clean Elections Index measures to what extent elections are free and fair, understood as absence of registration fraud, systematic irregularities, government intimidation of the opposition, vote buying, and electoral violence. For further discussions, see Section 5's review of "the record year" of elections.

Freedom of association is also under substantial attack in a large – and increasing – number of countries during the last decade. In 2024, it is declining in 22 countries while improving in only three. This is also a dramatic change compared to ten years ago when this component was declining in only *three* countries while improving in ten. The index captures, for example, to what extent civil society can operate freely, and opposition parties are free to form and participate in elections.

Liberal aspects also deteriorated substantially in a worrying number of countries over the past ten years. **Rule of law** is now declining in 18 countries, compared to *only four* in 2014. Similarly, **legislative constraints on the executive** are now deteriorating in 15 countries and **judicial constraints** in eleven, while in 2014 they were deteriorating in six and eight countries, respectively. These are really concerning pieces of evidence of the democratic declines across the board of components that make up democracy.

THE FINE-GRAINED DETAILS OF DEMOCRATIC DECLINE

The fine-grained analysis below confirms the disturbing situation with **freedom of expression**: nine out of the top 20 indicators declining in the most countries, come from the freedom of expression component of democracy. **Repression of civil society organizations** is also among the worst affected, closely followed by the **freedom and fairness of elections** and deliberation.

Figure 8 provides evidence of this. It displays the top 20 indicators that declined in the largest number of countries during the last decade.

We disaggregate each component of the democracy discussed above into the individual indicators capturing specific aspects. The V-Dem dataset includes over 600 indicators providing the most fine-grained picture of what specific rights and freedoms are most commonly under attack in today's world of democratic declines.

FIGURE 8. TOP 20 DECLINING INDICATORS, 2014–2024

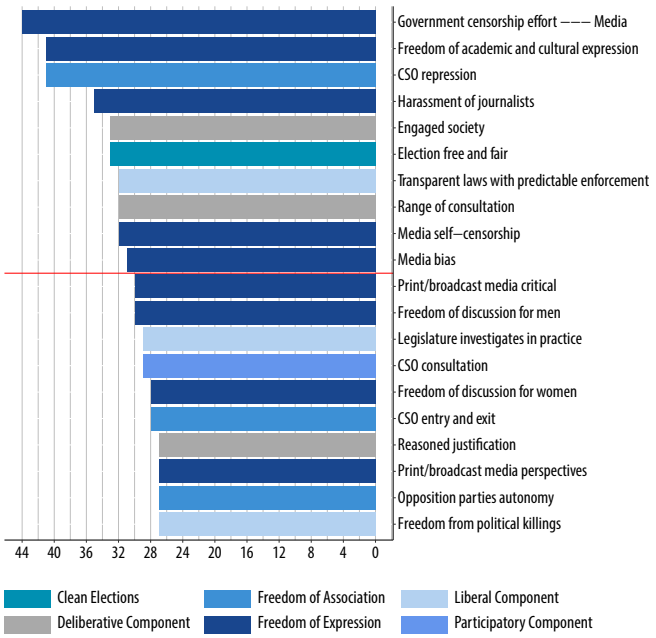


Figure 8 plots the top 20 indicators that decline in the largest number of countries between 2014 and 2024. The indicator is declining substantially and significantly if its 2024 value is at least 0.5 points lower than its 2014 value on a scale from 0 to 4 (for most indicators) or 0 to 5, and the confidence intervals do not overlap. The red line marks the top 10 indicators.

Government effort at censoring the media tops the list. In 44 countries, governments have substantially and statistically significantly increased their efforts at censoring the media over the past ten years. Among the worst offenders of freedom of the media are Afghanistan, El Salvador, India, and Myanmar.

Governments in 41 countries increasingly more often **repress civil society organization** (CSOs), compared to back in 2014. A vibrant civil society plays a key role in democratic process, by holding the government accountable to the public and stimulating public debate. CSOs are now increasingly under attack in countries such as Belarus, India, Peru, The Philippines, and Tunisia.

Freedom of academic and cultural expression is declining in 41 countries. This indicator measures the extent to which academic activities and cultural expressions are restricted and controlled by the government. Afghanistan is first among all countries in the world in terms of magnitude of decline. Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Nicaragua, and Russia are other examples of countries where academic freedom and cultural expression are increasingly harshly treated by the government.

Among other components of freedom of expression, we also find **harassment of journalists**, **media self-censorship**, and **media bias**. Attacks on journalists by the government and its associates have become increasingly more frequent in 35 countries. Guatemala, Hong Kong, Nicaragua, and Russia are some examples of countries where journalists are facing much worse difficulties to freely operate, compared to 2014. **Self-censorship** among journalists when reporting on politically sensitive issues is becoming more common

in 32 countries, for example, in Burundi, India, and Nicaragua. **Media bias**, or the extent to which opposition parties and candidates are discriminated against in favor of the incumbent or ruling party, is deteriorating in 31 countries. It is becoming increasingly more common in Argentina, Georgia, Moldova, and Pakistan, to name a few.

The indicator for **free and fair elections** is now worsening in 33 countries, placing it among the top 10 most frequently deteriorating indicators across the most countries over the last ten years. Among countries that held elections in 2024 and where these were significantly less free and fair than a decade ago are Comoros, Georgia, and Mozambique. We return to a more in-depth discussion of the "2024 year of elections" in Section 5.

Among indicators measuring aspects of democratic deliberation, the extent to which **society is engaged** in policy debates and the **range of consultations** at elite levels are worsening in 33 and 32 countries, respectively. These aspects have become significantly worse during the last decade in countries like Mexico, Niger, The Philippines, and El Salvador.

Finally, among liberal aspects of democracy, 32 countries have significantly increasingly undermined **transparent laws with predictable enforcement**, 29 have worsened in terms of **legislature's capacity to investigate** the executive's unconstitutional behavior, and in 27 countries, **political killings** by the state or its agents without due process of law and for political reasons are becoming increasingly more common. Countries that have declined on these components include Belarus, Benin, and Myanmar.

Action in memory of Alexei Navalny in St. Petersburg on February 16, 2024. (Gesanonstein/Openverse)

Box 4. ERT Methodology (Episodes of Regime Transformation)

Since 2024, Democracy Report uses the sophisticated ERT method (Maerz et al. 2024) to identify countries that are democratizing or autocratizing. This more scientific method is more cautious than the one used in our previous reports and takes underlying measurement uncertainty into account. The switch means that numbers in this year's Democracy Report are not fully comparable to Democracy Reports released before 2024.

A large team at the V-Dem Institute developed the ERT method over several years. It has now been vetted by extensive peer review in the scientific community and publications in several high-ranking journals. All details, including the code and a visualization app, can be found in associated publications and on Github.

Reduced to the bare bones, one can say that the ERT method works by first identifying small annual changes (>0.01 on the 0-1 scale) in a country's level of democracy measured by V-Dem's Electoral Democracy Index (EDI). If they accumulate within several years to substantial (>0.1), it is an episode. If changes are smaller, it is deemed mere fluctuations without substantial change that could result from uncertainty in the underlying measures. The ERT then classifies the outcome of democratization and autocratization episodes.

The ERT has several advantages over the method used in *Democracy Reports* before 2024 that simply took the difference between scores ten years ago and the last year. The most important difference is that the sophisticated, multilayered, and tested decision-rules for coding in the ERT, ensure greater confidence about "democratizers" and "autocratizers" than before. The ERT also allows us to distinguish between episodes that are 1) substantial and ongoing right now like autocratization in India; from those that 2) recently ended but still amount to being among the "worst offenders" in the last ten years, such as Türkiye's descent into electoral autocracy. We make use of that feature in *Democracy Report* since 2024.

In the *Democracy Report*, we use the latest ERT on EDI to identify start- and endpoints for episodes, including a couple of smaller methodological adjustments of the method done with this year's ERT release. For the purposes of the *Democracy Report* we then, however, display countries' scores on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) (and the EDI is one of the two main components of the LDI).

The ERT method is superior in increasing precision for identifying which countries are in ongoing episodes of change; which countries have ended such processes of change; and determining start and end dates of these transformation episodes. It introduces a precautious set of coding rules taking uncertainty into account to avoid wrongfully declaring countries "autocratizers" or "democratizers." Yet, that increase in sophistication also means bringing along some uncertainty about the last couple of years' counts. More countries may add to the counts of autocratizers and democratizers post-factum, if and when their magnitude of change makes them qualify. The ERT method then back-dates the start year of those processes of change to the year the change began in earnest.

Featured Article:
Maerz, Seraphine F., Amanda B. Edgell, Matthew C. Wilson, Sebastian Hellmeier, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2024. Episodes of Regime Transformation. *Journal of Peace Research* 61 (6).

Codebook:
Edgell, Amanda B., et al. 2024. Episodes of Regime Transformation Dataset and Codebook, v14. V-Dem Institute.

Data, Code & Codebook Repository:
github.com/vdeminstitute/ERT

Shiny App for Visualizations:
episodes.shinyapps.io/validation/

2 | Trends of Regime Transformation

- **The wave of autocratization has been going on for at least 25 years and shows no signs of cresting.**
- **An increasing number of countries – now 45 – are autocratizing.**
- **Autocratizers are home to 3.1 billion people, or 38% of the world population. South and Central Asia accounts for more than half.**
- **Only 19 countries with less than 6% of the world population – or 452 million – are democratizing. Two-thirds of those live in three countries: Brazil, Poland, and Thailand.**

This part of the *Democracy Report 2025* focuses on countries that are in ongoing regime transformation towards democracy or autocracy, presents global trends of regime change, and reviews regional patterns.[1]

The last few years is truly an exceptionally bad period for democracy. Record after record has been set in terms of number of countries in autocratization; proportion of countries in the world in autocratization; and share of the world population living in autocratizing, as well as autocratic, countries.

The world map in Figure 9 shows which 64 countries are either in an ongoing episode of democratization (blue) or autocratization (red), by the ERT methodology (see Box 4).

19 countries are democratizing and more than double that number – 45 – are autocratizing. The intensity of colors indicates the magnitude of change – not their level of democracy – on the LDI since the start of the episode.[2]

The ERT methodology that we have been using since Democracy Report 2024, identifies exactly which countries are in an ongoing episode of regime transformation, and when exactly the transformation started. We can therefore analyze the ongoing developments precisely.[3]

"Third Wave" of Autocratization Still Rising

The ERT identifies 45 countries that are undergoing autocratization, as of 2024. Figure 10 shows that the number of autocratizing countries has been increasing dramatically from zero in 1985 to 45 in 2024.

When looking from that perspective, the third wave of autocratization started in earnest already some 40 years ago. The curve started bending more substantially upwards in the late 1990s and early 2000s, meaning that the autocratization-wave has been building up for the last 25 years.

The 45 autocratizers is close to the all-time high – 48 countries, registered in 2021. The small decline in the number of autocratizing countries and the slight uptake in the number of democratizing countries in the last three years could be good news. It *could* indicate that some democratization is taking place as a reaction to autocratization – "U-Turns" (see Section 4).

FIGURE 9. COUNTRIES DEMOCRATIZING VS. AUTOCRATIZING, ONGOING IN 2024

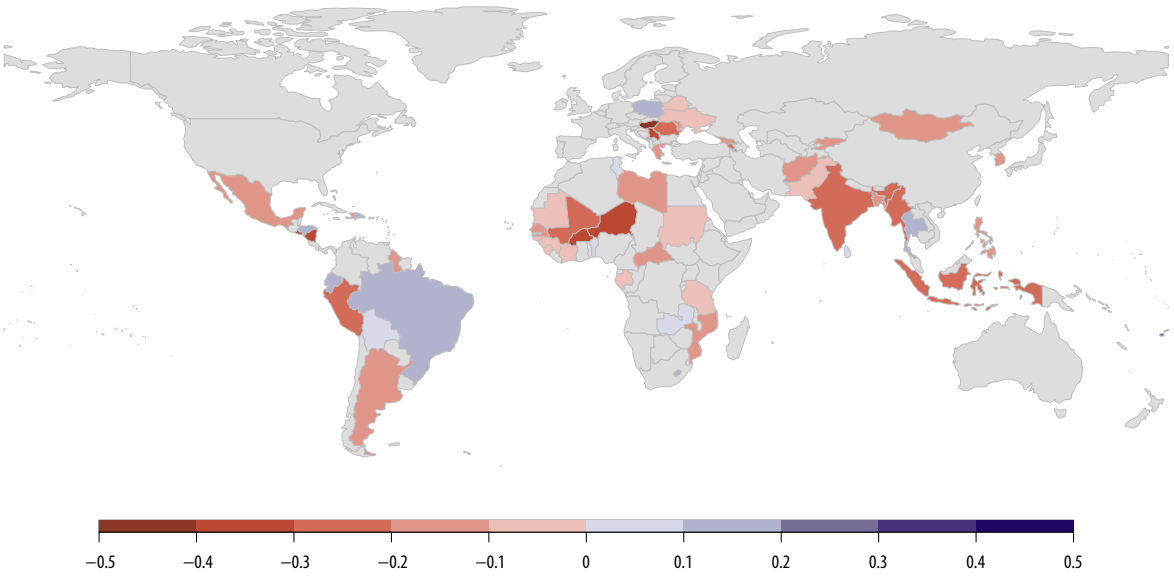


Figure 9 shows countries which are democratizing (blue) or autocratizing (red) in 2024, according to the ERT methodology. Color intensity shows the magnitude of change on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) since the start of regime transformation. Countries in gray are not in an ongoing regime transformation, as of 2024.

1 This perspective is different from Section 1 that looked at the state of democracy in terms of average levels of democracy, and trends for regime types. Here the focus is on countries that are now undergoing change impacting the global trend.

2 Since the V-Dem data is updated each year, with more experts and better data each year, also for years back in time, – the ERT also updates numbers and findings going back in time. This sometimes leads to differences from what was reported last year. This is a sign of better and more accurate data and not a bug.

3 The ERT has notable advantages to the "crude" assessment of changes in democracy index over one or more years. The ERT excludes countries that autocratized substantially during the decade or so but where the process is over. Türkiye, for example, turned into an electoral autocracy in 2013 and has been relatively stable on the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) since 2018. According to the ERT methodology, autocratization process in Türkiye ended and the regime is stable. Yet, by magnitude of decline over ten years, Türkiye would (wrongly) show up as an ongoing autocratizer. ERT also captures autocratization in cases with some recent change of direction – ongoing deterioration preceded by positive changes earlier (Bell-turns), or vice versa, autocratization that has recently been reversed (U-turns). Armenia, for example, improved substantially in 2018–2019 and became an electoral democracy in 2018. Yet, it has been declining on democracy index since 2020 and shows up as an ongoing autocratizer in 2024. When compared to its 2014-level, Armenia still registers substantial positive changes and thus would (wrongly) be marked as an ongoing democratizer. Yet, the most recent developments in Armenia hardly qualify as "positive". The ERT, thus, gives the analyses presented in *Democracy Report* more precision and reliability than before, improving the validity of conclusions.

Yet, one should be careful not to jump quickly to such conclusions. The ERT method is "conservative" (as scientific methods should be) with asserting that a country has entered a period of regime transformation. The high thresholds are important to avoid "false positives" that could be resulting from measurement error and noise in the underlying data.[4]

FIGURE 10. AUTOCRATIZING VS. DEMOCRATIZING COUNTRIES, 1974–2024

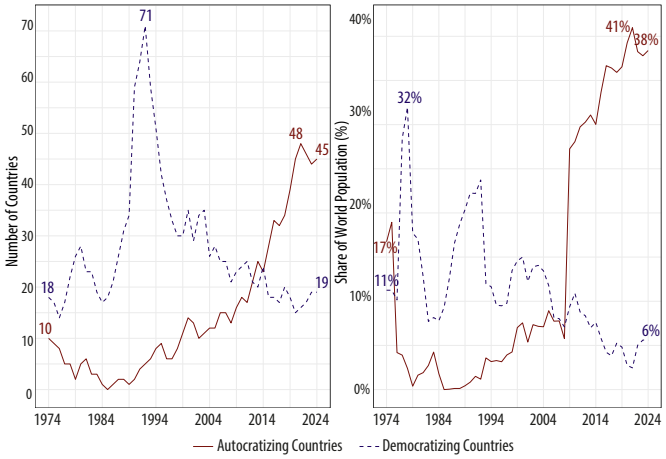


Figure 10 shows trends of democratization and autocratization over the last 50 years. The right panel displays the number of countries in each category, and the right panel shows the share of the world's population living in autocratizing or democratizing countries.

Figure 10 presents the global **trends of autocratization** and **democratization** over the last 50 years. The red line in the left panel shows that the number of autocratizing countries declined gradually from ten in 1974 to zero in 1985.

Around 1990, the trajectory started to reverse, and the numbers were slowly increasing up to 16 autocratizing countries in 2009. Since then, the numbers rise steeply and hit a historical record of 48 countries in 2021.

Over the last 50 years, trends for autocratizing countries are almost inverse to the democratizing ones. The dashed blue line in the left panel of Figure 10 shows that the number of democratizers skyrocketed after 1989 – the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union – and peaked in 1992 when 71 countries were democratizing at the same time. The number then plummeted to 15 by 2020, which was the second-lowest point in 50 years.

There are 19 democratizers in 2024, ten of which are U-turns – reversals of autocratization and nine are "stand alone" (see Section 4).[5]

ALMOST 40% OF WORLD POPULATION SUFFER AUTOCRATIZATION

As of 2024, almost 40% of the world population reside in autocratizing countries (right panel of Figure 10). For comparison, nearly no one lived in autocratizing countries in 1985-1988, and only 4% as late as in 1997-1998. Over the last 25 years, that share has risen steeply and steadily to engulf an ever-larger proportion of people in the world.

Figure 11 shows that many of the autocratizing countries are influential regional powers that have large populations, such as **Argentina**, **India**, **Indonesia**, **Mexico**, and **South Korea**. Other populous countries that are autocratizing include **Bangladesh**, **Myanmar**, **Pakistan**, and **The Philippines**.

Autocratization is also manifest within the European Union, affecting **Greece**, **Hungary**, and **Romania**. This adds to the heft of the current wave of autocratization when influential countries with large economies have the capacity and can be expected to exert power on other countries.

A small minority – less than 6% – live in democratizing countries in 2024 (right panel of Figure 10). Although the share is an increase from 2% in 2021, this number is still remarkably low. The share of the world population living in democratizing countries has stayed below 10% for the last 15 years.

The democratizing countries are typically smaller in size, economy, and population (see Figure 11). Some examples include **The Gambia**, **The Maldives**, and **The Seychelles**. Yet, there are some important exceptions, such as **Brazil**, **Thailand**, and – the latest addition to the list – **Poland**.

FIGURE 11. DEMOCRATIZERS VS. AUTOCRATIZERS, BY POPULATION SIZE IN 2024

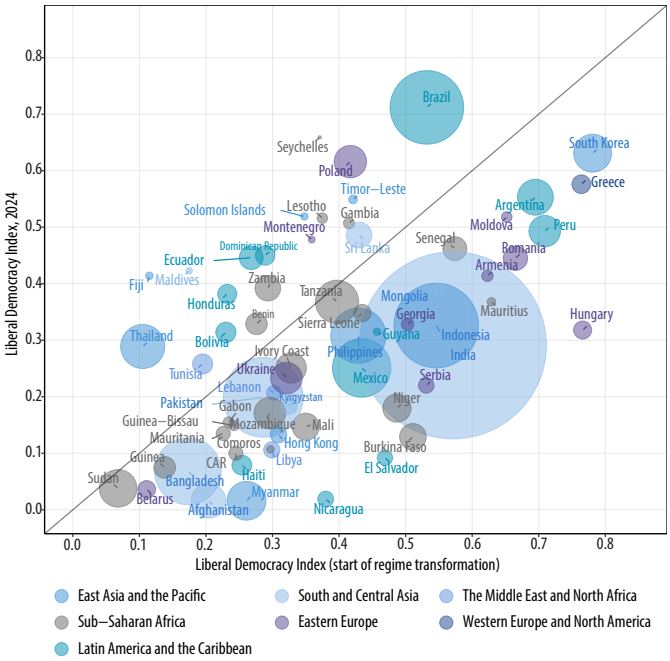


Figure 11 displays country scores on the LDI in 2024 (y-axis) and at the start of autocratization / democratization episodes (x-axis), which varies by country (start years can be found in Figures 13 and 17). Size of the bubbles reflects population size. Countries above the diagonal line are democratizing, whereas countries below the diagonal line are autocratizing, as of 2024, by the ERT methodology.

A View of the 64 Countries – Across Regions

The 45 autocratizing and the 19 democratizing countries are distributed across all regions of the world, as shown in Figure 12. Four countries (or 17% of the region) in the **East Asia-Pacific** are in ongoing episodes of democratization, as of 2024: Fiji, Solomon Islands, Thailand, and Timor-Leste. However, five (22% of the region) are in a substantial decline: Hong Kong, Indonesia, Myanmar, South Korea, and The Philippines.

4 This also means that there are several countries whose "potential" decline started already in 2022 or 2023, or earlier, but the criteria for declaring them "manifest autocratizers" are not fulfilled – and may never be. If deteriorations in these countries continue in the coming years, that could substantially increase the numbers for 2024 post-factum. We label such cases as "near misses". There are currently 20 "near misses" of autocratization and 9 "near misses" of democratization in the data (see Section 6).

5 Note that the caveats about the numbers of episodes for the last several years discussed above also apply to democratizers. The numbers for the last several years could increase post-factum in the coming years if countries that now qualify as "potential" democratizers continue to improve, and democratization episodes become "manifest."

Two countries are democratizing in **South and Central Asia**: The Maldives and Sri Lanka. By contrast, six countries (43% of countries in the region) are autocratizing: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, and Pakistan. India with 1.4 billion, Pakistan with 251 million, and Bangladesh with almost 174 million are three of the most populated countries in the world. Their episodes of autocratization contribute greatly to the high share of the world population living in both autocracies (Figure 5) and in autocratizing countries (Figure 10).

MENA is the region with the lowest overall level of democracy in the world. It also has only one democratizer – Tunisia – that is only recovering slightly after a substantial autocratization. Two countries are autocratizing – Libya and Lebanon.

The region with the largest number of countries is **Sub-Saharan Africa** (*N*=51). This region also has the largest number of autocratizers – 16 (31% of the region): Burkina Faso, Central African Republic (CAR), The Comoros, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Tanzania. The region also harbors five democratizing countries (or 10% of the region): Benin, Lesotho, The Gambia, The Seychelles, and Zambia.

Two democratizing countries are in **Eastern Europe**, which make 8% of the region: Montenegro and Poland. Yet, a third of the region – eight countries – are in processes of autocratization: Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Hungary, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine. Some of these countries, such as Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine are heavily exposed to Russian influence, either by physical invasion (Ukraine), economic and military dependence (Armenia and Belarus), or meddling in election processes (Georgia and Romania). We discuss the latter in Section 5.

No country across **North America and Western Europe** is substantially improving on democracy levels, while Greece is the only country that is in an ongoing episode of substantial democratic decline by the ERT.[6]

Finally, **Latin America and the Caribbean** has five democratizing countries (or 20% of the region): Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, and Honduras. Three of them – Bolivia, Brazil, and Ecuador – are among the "U-turn" democratizers – countries that are successfully reversing autocratization processes of the previous years (see further discussion in Section 4). Yet, autocratization is widespread in the region, with seven countries (or 28% of the region) currently regressing: Argentina, El Salvador, Guyana, Haiti, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru.

A protester doing the three finger salute in front of the Democracy Monument in Bangkok, Thailand. (Kanth Boyd via Shutterstock)

FIGURE 12. DEMOCRATIZATION AND AUTOCRATIZATION ACROSS REGIONS, 2024

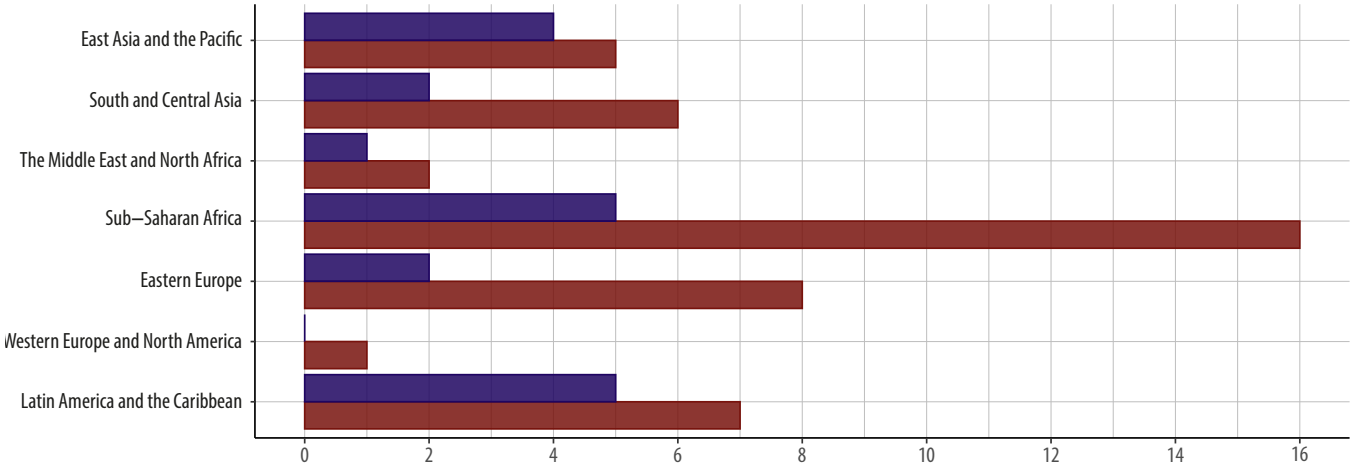


Figure 12 plots the number of countries that are democratizing and autocratizing in each region in 2024, by the ERT methodology.

6 The USA register a substantial and statistically significant decline on the LDI (see Figure A7 in Appendix). Yet, by the end of 2024, it is still below the ERT threshold on the EDI. By magnitude of change on the LDI, Cyprus, Italy, Netherlands, and Portugal also register concerning declines.

People are running as police are firing teargas during a coffin rally of anti-quota protesters at the University of Dhaka, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on July 17, 2024. (Syed Mahamudur Rahman/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

3 | Autocratizing Countries

- **45 countries are currently undergoing episodes of autocratization. That number was 42 in last year's *Democracy Report*, and only 25 in the 2021 report.**
- **27 of the 45 autocratizers were democracies at the start of their episode. Only 9 remain democracies in 2024. The fatality rate is 67%.**
- **Out of the 45 autocratizers, 25 are "stand-alone" and 20 are "bell-turn" episodes.**
- **In 8 of the top 10 stand-alone cases, autocratization started in a democracy. In 2024, only 3 of them remain democracies.**
- **9 out of the top 10 bell-turn cases were democracies at some point during the episode. Only 2 of them remain democracies.**
- **Media censorship is the most popular practice among autocratizing governments, closely followed by diminishing the free- and fairness of elections and repression of civil society.**

There are 45 countries with ongoing processes of autocratization, as of 2024. With the precision of the ERT methodology, the *Democracy Report 2025* can show the trajectories of these countries, tracing the developments back in time to their onsets. All 45 autocratizing countries are listed in Figure 13. The high number of autocratizing

FIGURE 13. ALL 45 CASES OF ONGOING AUTOCRATIZATION, 2024

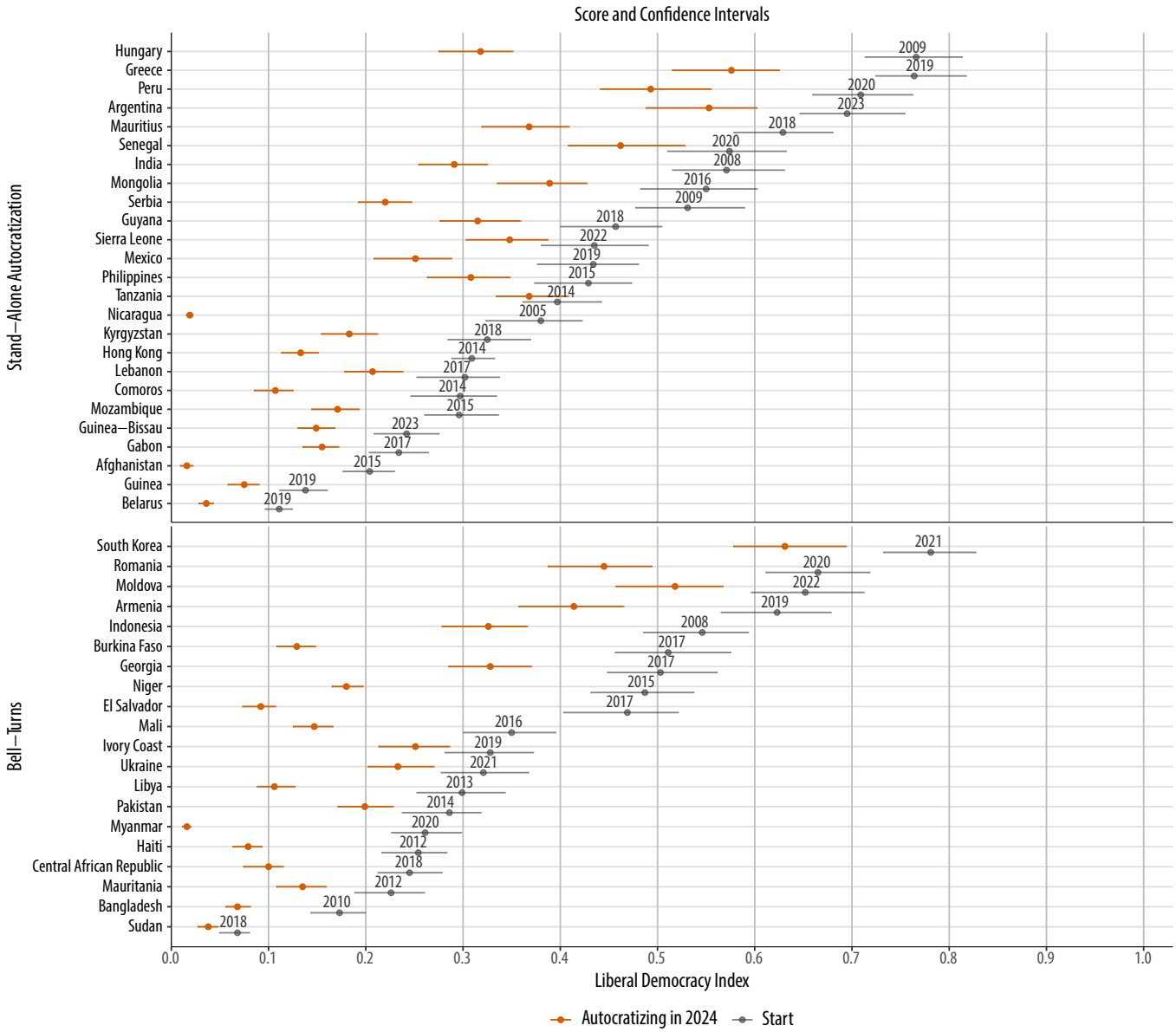


Figure 13 shows the LDI scores and confidence intervals at the start of autocratization (in black). These are technically ERT "pre-episode" years, meaning that the following year was the first year recording a decline. The LDI score at the pre-episode year is thus showing the level of democracy a country had before autocratization. The values for 2024 (orange-red) reveal the total magnitude of change. The ERT uses the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) for identifying episodes. For consistency with the rest of the analyses in the Democracy Report, we display countries' respective values on the LDI. A country may change more on the EDI than on the LDI, which explains cases with overlapping confidence intervals (they do not overlap on the EDI).

countries reflects the steep increase in autocratization in the world, discussed in Section 2. By comparison, the number of autocratizers were 42 in last year's *Democracy Report*, 25 in the 2021 *Democracy Report*, and only 10 at the beginning of the 21st century.

Among the 45 episodes ongoing as of 2024, there are two types: **"stand-alone" autocratization** – where the process of deterioration starts independently, after a period of relative stability, and **"bell-turns"** – where autocratization follows shortly after, and is connected to, a period of democratization.

The complete list is presented in Figure 13, grouped into 25 stand-alone and 20 bell-turn processes. Countries are ordered according to their levels on the LDI at the onset of autocratization, from highest to lowest. The LDI score for 2024 shows the total magnitude of deterioration by the end of 2024.

If autocratization starts in a democracy, the probability of it surviving is very low. Of the 45 autocratizers, 27 were democracies at the start of their episodes. 18 of these are now autocracies.[1] That is a fatality rate of 67%, and these are still *ongoing* processes. It could get worse: A recent study analyzing all episodes of autocratization starting in democracies from 1900 to 2019, documents an almost 80% fatality rate.[2]

The remaining countries in Figure 13 were already autocracies when they started to regress further. Out of the 18, 17 were electoral autocracies and twelve – or 71% – transitioned to closed autocracies. This shows how autocratization affects citizens also in autocracies.

Changes Since *Democracy Report 2024*

There are ten autocratizers appearing on the list this year who were not there in last year's *Democracy Report*: six stand-alone, and four bell-turns. The full list is found in Table 2.

The start years listed in Table 2 for the "new" autocratizers highlight both a typical feature of autocratization in today's world, and an important feature of the ERT methodology.

The typical feature of contemporary autocratization is that deteriorations are slow and incremental, making the beginnings hard to distinguish from noise in data. It is not easy to tell at first which small declines will lead to "genuine" autocratization, and which will not. This was established already in one of the first scientific analyses of the third wave of autocratization.[3] Yet, as smaller deteriorations accumulate into a large aggregate decline, uncertainty reduces.

Among the new autocratizers, countries like **Georgia** and **Tanzania** illustrate the point. They started to deteriorate several years ago but registered substantial overall decline only by the end of 2024.

Now, we can tell for certain that they are cases of autocratization. The ERT methodology thus traces their processes back to start in 2017 and 2014, respectively.

TABLE 2. AUTOCRATIZERS APPEARING ON THE LIST IN 2024

	Stand-Alone	Episode Start		Bell-Turns	Episode Start
1	Argentina	2023	1	Bangladesh	2010
2	Gabon	2017	2	Georgia	2017
3	Guinea-Bissau	2023	3	Ivory Coast	2019
4	Mozambique	2015	4	Moldova	2022
5	Sierra Leone	2022			
6	Tanzania	2014			

TABLE 3. AUTOCRATIZERS DISAPPEARING FROM THE LIST IN 2024

	Stand-Alone	Episode End		Bell-Turns	Episode End
1	Botswana	2023	1	Croatia	2017
2	Cambodia	2019			
3	Chad	2022			
4	Ghana	"near miss"			
5	Guatemala	2022			
6	Poland	2021			

The end year of the episode is the last year when a country was still registering declines.

Seven autocratizers disappeared from the list, compared to last year's report. Table 3 shows the list of such cases and their end years.

There are several good news for democracy in this group.

Autocratization was halted and reversed in **Poland** with the 2023 election bringing an end to the rule of the Law and Justice (PiS) party (see Section 4). Autocratization stopped in **Botswana** before democratic breakdown when the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) lost the 2024 election after nearly six-decade rule. A peaceful turnover marked the end of the autocratization episode. For **Guatemala**, the 2023 elections were a turning point when the opposition won despite an unfair electoral process, intimidation and harassment of independent journalists, civil society, and judges.[4] As of 2024, Guatemala is only a small margin away from becoming a U-turn (see Section 6).

Three processes merely stalled after autocratization. In **Chad**, the episode terminated with the 2024 elections, returning civilian rule and electoral autocracy. In **Croatia**, democracy survived autocratization of the earlier 2010s and stabilized at a lower level of democratic quality by 2017. Croatia also remains a "near miss" case due to more recent worrying deteriorations (see Section 6). In **Cambodia**, autocratization ended in 2019 with establishing a stable autocracy at lower democracy levels.

Finally, **Ghana** has been balancing around the ERT threshold for autocratizer for the last several years, and some minor improvements of the last year have put it once again below the threshold (see Section 6).

Stand-Alone Autocratization

Eight out of the top 10 stand-alone autocratizers were democracies before the start of autocratization. Democracy has already broken down in five of the eight cases – **Hungary**, **India**, **Mauritius**, **Nicaragua**, and **Serbia**. Autocratization started more recently in the other three – **Greece**, **Mexico**, and **Peru** – and they are the only countries that remain democracies in 2024. It seems beyond doubt that democracy is vulnerable also in these three.

In two of the top 10 stand-alone autocratizers, the downward process started when they were already autocracies: **Afghanistan** became a closed autocracy after the Taliban's ascent to power, while electoral autocracy in **The Comoros** continues to erode further.

Figure 14 shows the top 10 out of the 25 countries with ongoing stand-alone episodes of autocratization. "Stand-alone" means that autocratization started after a period of relative stability on democracy level. The figure details the trajectories of these cases on the LDI, from the start of each country's episode to the end of 2024. Table 4 shows their rank order by the total magnitude of decline.

1 Figure 13 does not include information on each country's regime type at the start of the episode and at end of 2024, but that information is found in Appendix Table A1.
2 Boese, V. et al. 2021. How democracies prevail: Democratic resilience as a two-stage process. *Democratization* 28(5).
3 Lührmann, A., and S.I. Lindberg. 2019. A Third Wave of Autocratization Is Here: What Is New About It? *Democratization* 26(7).
4 www.freedomhouse.org/country/guatemala/freedom-world/2024

FIGURE 14. TOP 10 STAND-ALONE AUTOCRATIZERS, 2024

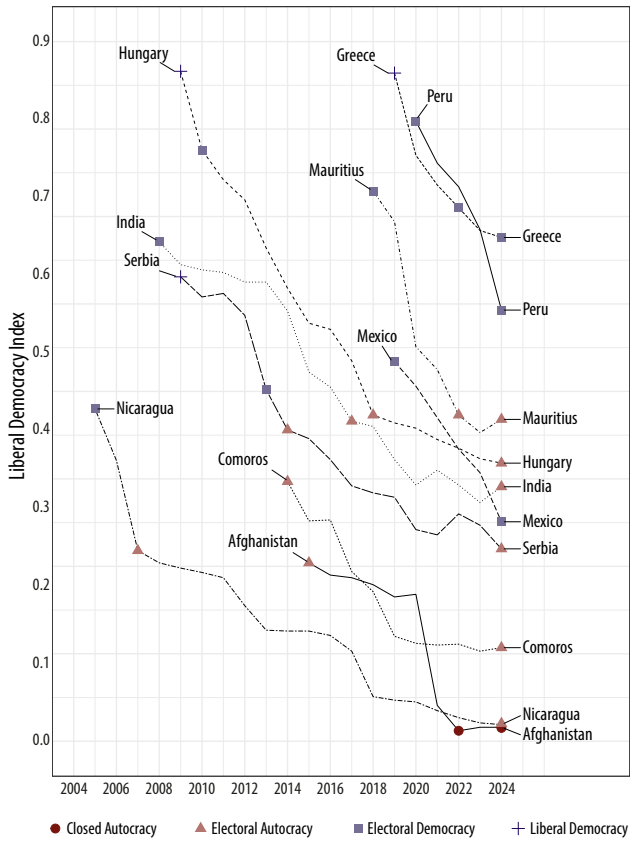


Figure 14 plots the LDI values for the top 10 stand-alone autocratizing countries. For technical details, see note under Figure 13.

TABLE 4. MAGNITUDE OF DECLINE, FIGURE 14

Rank	Country	Episode Start	Change on LDI
1	Hungary	2009	-0.448
2	Nicaragua	2005	-0.361
3	Serbia	2009	-0.311
4	India	2008	-0.288
5	Mauritius	2018	-0.261
6	Peru	2020	-0.216
7	Comoros	2014	-0.190
8	Greece	2019	-0.188
9	Afghanistan	2015	-0.188
10	Mexico	2019	-0.183

We start with discussing the three countries that remain democracies in 2024.

Autocratization in **Greece** started in 2019 with new Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis gradually weakening rule of law and attacking media freedom. Government wiretapping of opposition leaders, journalists, and even other members of the government unraveled in 2022. Yet, Mitsotakis and his New Democracy party got an absolute majority in the 2023 elections, and three new nationalist far-right parties (Spartans, Greek Solution, and Victory) got a total of 34 seats, further eroding the democratic commitment in the party system.[5] However, the elections for the European Parliament in 2024 resulted in a severe punishment for the ruling New Democracy party that reached the lowest vote share in 15 years with 28.3%. Greece turned from liberal to electoral democracy by the end of 2022, and retains this status, as of 2024.

Mexico's anti-democratic plunge is dramatic over the last three years. The 2018 landslide victory of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) led to monopolized control of executive and legislative branches and a majority (23 out of 31 by the end of 2024) of subnational states[6], weakening of judicial constraints, and strengthening the military's power in civil matters.[7] With elections in June 2024, MORENA increased its legislative seat share from 40% to 47%, and AMLO's successor Claudia Sheinbaum winning the presidency – the first woman ever elected president in Mexico. Mexico ranks as "grey zone" electoral democracy (ED-) meaning that its status as a democracy is uncertain by the end of 2024.

Peru displays one of the sharpest downward slopes in recent times. Pedro Castillo secured a close victory in the 2021 elections but did not have a parliamentary majority. Castillo attempted an autogolpe in 2022 and was impeached by the Congress amidst violently suppressed protests. Peru's Congress has carried out unpopular constitutional reforms, such as establishing a bi-cameral system, increasing the number of members of parliament, and restricting the judiciary's independence.[8] By the end of 2024, Peru ranks as electoral democracy and awaits new elections only in 2026.

Five of the top 10 stand-alone autocratizers started as democracies, but autocratization led to a breakdown:

Hungary ranks top of all 45 autocratizers in terms of magnitude of change (see Table 4) and is also the top autocratizer of the last 25 years of the "third wave of autocratization". Hungary was a liberal democracy in 2009, before Viktor Orbán and his anti-pluralist[9] and Christian-nationalist Fidesz party came to power. Once in power, they initiated incremental rolling back of checks and balances in a textbook example of contemporary autocratization. A series of well-documented derailments of democracy[10] led to electoral autocracy in 2018. Fidesz passed the "Protection of Sovereignty Act" in 2023, allowing for arbitrary scrutiny and unlimited access to personal data. Hungary records a seventh year as an electoral autocracy with 2024.

India's autocratization from 2008 is also emblematic of the "third wave of autocratization", with its slow but systematic dismantling of democratic institutions. The ruling anti-pluralist, Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Prime Minister Modi's derailing of democracy is thoroughly documented, including deteriorations in freedom of expression and independence of the media, harassments of journalists critical of the government, attacks on civil society and the opposition using laws on sedition, defamation, and counterterrorism.[11] The elections in June 2024 was a setback for the BJP forcing it to govern in a coalition.[12] 2024 is the first year since 2008 with no deteriorations on democracy levels for India but it remains an electoral autocracy since 2017.

5 Angiolillo, F., et al. 2025. Party Systems, Democratic Positions, and Regime Changes: Introducing the Party-System Democracy Index. *British Journal of Political Science*.
6 www.csis.org/analysis/uncertain-future-democratic-backsliding-through-executive-aggrandizement-under-amlo; Aguiar Aguilar, A., et al. 2025. Is Mexico at the Gates of Authoritarianism? *Journal of Democracy 36(1).*
7 ibid
8 www.freedomhouse.org/country/peru/freedom-world/2024
9 Medzihorsky, J., and S.I. Lindberg. 2024. Walking the talk: How to identify anti-pluralist parties. *Party Politics 30(3).*
10 Ordanoski, G. and F. Angiolillo. 2024. Incumbents' Strategies of Repression during Autocratization: Evidence from Hungary and North Macedonia. SSRN Working Paper.
11 Tudor, M. 2023. Why India's Democracy is Dying. *Journal of Democracy 34(3);* www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/03/india-crackdown-on-opposition-reaches-a-crisis-point-ahead-of-national-elections/
12 Maiorano, D. 2024. India's 2024 Elections: Has Democratic Backsliding Come to a Halt? *IAI Commentaries (24)37.*

Box 5. Bell-Turns and U-Turns

Bell-turns are episodes of regime transformation where democratization is directly followed by autocratization. Inversely, U-turns are episodes of regime transformation where autocratization is closely followed by democratization.

We use the ERT to identify episodes of democratization and autocratization (see Box 4). We adopt a rule of no more than five years between the episodes to make a Bell- or a U-turn. This comes from the recently published academic article listed below.

Simply put, Bell-turns are episodes where democratization turns into autocratization *within no more than five years* after the end of democratic advances. U-turns are episodes where autocratization transmutes into democratization within an equivalent period.

Featured Article: Nord, Marina, Fabio Angiolillo, Martin Lundstedt, Felix Wiebrecht, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2025. When Autocratization is Reversed: Episodes of U-Turns since 1900. *Democratization*, online first.

In **Mauritius**, government media censorship efforts have been increasing significantly since 2019. In 2021, the government introduced several new regulations restricting the work of broadcasting companies and journalists.[13] Wiretapping scandals were also among the series of actions undermining democracy.[14] One of the longest-standing democracies in Africa dating back to its independence in 1968, Mauritius descended to a "grey zone" electoral autocracy in 2022. Yet, in a radical turn of events, the 2024 general elections led to a landslide victory for the opposition gaining 60 out of 62 legislative seats while the former ruling party was eradicated in the parliament (see also Section 5).[15]

Nicaragua is in a two-decade long process of autocratization with Daniel Ortega and the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) undermining the quality of elections, abolishing presidential term limits, eliminating opposition parties from serious contention, shutting down thousands of civil society organizations, and doing away with checks on executive power.[16] In February 2025, Ortega and his wife Murillo consolidated "absolute power" by amending the constitution and becoming "co-presidents".[17] In two decades, Nicaragua has dropped from an electoral democracy to the bottom rung next to closed autocracies like Afghanistan and Myanmar.

Serbia is another case of protracted democratic backsliding with President Aleksandar Vučić and his Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) turning Serbia into an electoral autocracy by 2014, and then increasingly harassing the opposition, bolstering election irregularities, and undermining media freedom.[18] The 2023 elections involved intimidation against opposition candidates and electoral fraud leading to a new victory for the incumbent right-wing government.[19] In late 2024, Prime Minister Vučević faced severe student protests leading to his resignation on 28 January 2025. At the time of writing, however, Vučević remains in office in acting capacity until the National Assembly elects a new Prime Minister. Serbia remains an electoral autocracy since 2014.Two countries were already autocracies when their stand-alone autocratization started.

The Comoros was an electoral autocracy when the 2016 elections – marred by violence and irregularities – initiated the process of autocratization. In 2018, President Assoumani abolished the Constitutional Court and extended presidential term limits in a referendum boycotted by the opposition. Opponents of the referendum were persecuted and public protests – repressed by the army. Assoumani won a third term in the 2019 election, and a fourth one in January 2024.[20] The Comoros remains electoral autocracy by the end of 2024.

In **Afghanistan**, the first signs of deterioration can be traced back to 2016, but after the Taliban takeover in August 2021 a quick and sharp curtailment of almost all freedoms followed. Since 2021, the Taliban rules by decree, Sharia law is used, women's rights are revoked, political and civic rights are suspended, journalists are restricted by violence, and universities are systematically shut down in short order. Afghanistan is one of the most repressive closed autocracies in the world by 2024.

Bell-Turn Autocratization

Bell-turns can be thought of as episodes of *"failed democratization"*, or re-autocratization shortly after a period of substantial improvement. 90% of the ongoing Bell-turn cases were democracies at some point during the episode. Yet, all but two of these ongoing processes have already led to breakdown of democracy. Only **Armenia** and **Romania** remain democracies, but their current trajectories suggest that democracy may be at risk.

Four cases where democracy broke down – **Burkina Faso**, **Libya**, **Mali**, and **Niger** – are now closed autocracies, while **El Salvador**, **Georgia**, and **Indonesia** are now electoral autocracies.

Notably, in **Georgia** and **Indonesia**, democracy broke down in 2024, during the "record year" of elections. Indonesia was already in democratic "grey zone" by the end of 2023 but continued to deteriorate further in 2024. The election year 2024 marked the largest one-year decline since **Georgia**'s independence, turning it into an electoral autocracy.

Myanmar is the only country on the top 10 bell-turn list that has never been a democracy. The period of democratization in the early 2010s led to an electoral autocracy. A closed autocracy was reestablished with the 2021 coup, and the situation remains unchanged by the end of 2024.

Figure 15 details the trajectories on the LDI for the top 10 episodes of bell-turn autocratization. In Bell-turns, a period of democratization is closely followed by a period of autocratization.

Table 5 shows countries' ranking in terms of magnitude of decline during the episode. **Burkina Faso** is the worst offender in that perspective, while **Georgia** has the least substantial change among the top 10.

Among the two countries where democracy still survives, **Armenia**'s at first slow democratization turned it into an electoral democracy with the 2018 Velvet Revolution,[21] making it also one of the top 10 democratizers featured in previous issues of *Democracy Report*. The autocratization episode began in 2020, with the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Nikola Pashinyan's government resorted to authoritarian tactics, such as restricting freedom of expression, civic

13 www.freedomhouse.org/country/mauritius/freedom-world/2024
14 www.rsf.org/en/five-journalists-targeted-wiretapping-mauritius-rsf-calls-independent-investigation
15 www.idea.int/democracytracker/report/mauritius/november-2024
16 Stuenkel, O., and A. E. Feldman. 2017. "The Unchecked Demise of Nicaraguan Democracy". Carnegie Endownment for International Peace.
17 www.france24.com/en/live-news/20250131-nicaragua-legislature-cements-absolute-power-of-president-wife/
18 Milaçić, F. 2024. Why Aspiring Autocrats are Watching Serbia. *Journal of Democracy*, online exclusive.
19 www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240202IPR17327/serbia-did-not-fulfil-its-commitments-to-free-and-fair-elections-say-meps
20 www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68002934
21 Lanskoy, M., and E. Suthers.2019. Armenia's Velvet Revolution. *Journal of Democracy* 30(2).

FIGURE 15. TOP 10 BELL-TURN AUTOCRATIZERS, 2024

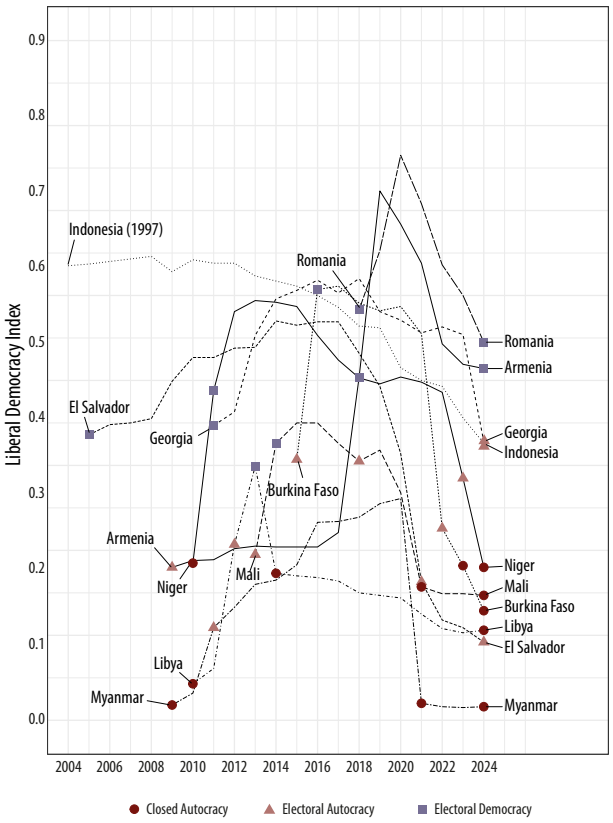


Figure 15 plots the LDI values for the top 10 bell-turn autocratizing countries. For technical details, see note under Figure 13.

TABLE 5. MAGNITUDE OF DECLINE, FIGURE 15

Rank	Country	Episode Start	Change on LDI
1	Burkina Faso	2017	-0.382
2	El Salvador	2017	-0.377
3	Niger	2015	-0.307
4	Myanmar	2020	-0.245
5	Indonesia	2008	-0.220
6	Romania	2020	-0.220
7	Armenia	2019	-0.209
8	Mali	2016	-0.203
9	Libya	2013	-0.193
10	Georgia	2017	-0.175

space, and civil liberties. Growing spread of hate speech, disinformation, and polarization fueled the democratic decline,[22] along with Azerbaijan's victory in the war by 2023. In 2024, political polarization continues to threaten Armenia's democratic future.

Romania democratized from 2019 under the government led by the National Liberal Party who improved rule of law and freedom of expression.[23] The turnaround started with a new coalition government elected in 2021. Intimidation of the opposition, suppression of civil society, attacks on the media, and interventions by intelligence services became common.[24] An internal political crisis followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine spreading instability in the country. In 2024, Romania annulled the results of the first round of the presidential elections due to foreign interference from Russia.[25] By 2024, it retains the status of electoral democracy.

Out of the two countries where democracy broke down during 2024, **Georgia** was one of the top 5 "near misses" of autocratization in last year's *Democracy Report*. A period of democratization with improvements in judicial independence, freedom of speech, and civil liberties lasted from 2013 until 2017. The reversal started in 2018, but deteriorations were gradual until 2023. In 2024, democracy scores plummeted, turning Georgia into an electoral autocracy. The 2024 electoral process was marred with accusations of fraud and massive protests,[26] the government labeled political opposition as criminal forces, threatened to ban opposition parties,[27] protesters and civil society actors faced arrests and charges,[28] and a new "foreign agents" law was introduced.[29] The European Parliament issued a resolution stating that Georgia's democracy was at risk and putting the country's integration with the EU on hold.[30]

Indonesia is the other bell-turn country where democracy broke down in 2024. Democratization started in 1998 with toppling the authoritarian President Suharto and lasted until the late 2000s. President Joko Widodo's rule (2014-2024) led to increasing polarization and illiberalism. His government regularly bent state institutions for personal gains, cracked down on Islamist opposition, and forbade civil servants from engaging in "hate speech" against the government.[31] In 2024, Indonesians elected as new president Prabowo Subianto, a former military general accused of human rights abuses during Suharto's dictatorship. Indonesia is at its lowest democracy levels since the beginning of the 21st century.

There are five bell-turn cases that first became democracies but then democracy broke down, and where deteriorations continue. Three of those – **Burkina Faso**, **Mali**, and **Niger** – suffered military coups between 2021 and 2023, and are currently led by military juntas. They withdrew from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 2024[32] and formed the Alliance of Sahel States.[33] This showcases their isolation from the rest of the region.

Burkina Faso democratized following the 2015 general elections but shifted towards a bell-turn autocratization already by 2018. Following two coups in 2022 and conflicts with Jihadists, the military junta expelled French forces and further restricted freedom of expression and civil liberties. In 2024, the junta issued temporary bans on foreign media outlets.[34] Elections were postponed indefinitely and the military government announced that they would govern until 2029.[35] Burkina Faso remains a closed autocracy in 2024.

Mali progressed on democracy following the 2013 presidential elections that restored civilian governance. Despite ongoing conflicts in northern Mali involving rebel groups supported by Islamist militants, democracy survived for several years with substantial foreign aid

22 Terzyan, A. 2024. Armenia in the Aftermath of the War: Between Changing Landscapes and Unchanging Problems. Eurasian Institutes, WP 1/2024.
23 www.v-dem.net/media/publications/CB__12_Romania_v2.pdf
24 Chinea, C., and M. Ionescu. 2024. "The State of Democracy in Romania: A Future Problem on the EU Agenda." ELF Research Paper No 5.
25 www.edition.cnn.com/2024/12/06/europe/romania-annuls-presidential-election-intl/index.html
26 www.osce.org/odihr/elections/584050
27 www.politico.eu/article/georgia-opposition-ban-georgian-dream-party-election-eu-enlargement-irakli-kobakhidze/
28 www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyj2e57r70o
29 www.commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10047/
30 www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20241003IPR24429/parliament-says-georgia-s-democracy-is-at-risk
31 Mietzner, M. 2024. The Limits of Autocratization in Indonesia: Power Dispersal and Elite Competition in a Compromised Democracy. *Third World Quarterly*, online first; Warburton, E. 2020. "Deepening Polarization and Democratic Decline in Indonesia". In: Carothers, T., and A. O'Donohue (eds.): Political Polarization in South and Southeast Asia: Old Divisions, New Dangers. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
32 www.apnews.com/article/ecowas-niger-mali-burkina-faso-672c3db44eb28fd4a181840f5ba00296
33 www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/16/mali-niger-and-burkina-faso-establish-sahel-security-alliance
34 www.apnews.com/article/burkina-faso-killing-media-radio-4905ce1a72bddb39f52d55acd1907482, www.africanews.com/2024/10/08/burkina-faso-military-junta-suspends-voice-of-america/
35 www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5117d8kz16o

and military peacekeeping support. The shift towards autocracy began in 2017 and Mali became an electoral autocracy the following year. Military coups in 2020 and 2021 resulted in a closed autocracy, which remains the country's status as of 2024.

Niger's 2011 general election established Niger as an electoral democracy. By 2016, conflicts in Mali started to affect also Niger, and the government-imposed restrictions on freedom of expression.[36] The 2020-2021 general elections marked Niger's first-ever democratic transition of power, but the new government was overthrown by a military junta in July 2023, thus establishing a closed autocracy – a status Niger holds by the end of 2024.

El Salvador went through a period of democratic deepening between 2006 and 2017 improving on its electoral democracy established back in 1999. The bell-turn reversal started in 2019 when political polarization, corruption, violence, and distrust in traditional political parties resulted in the election of an "outsider" and self-proclaimed "world's coolest dictator", President Nayib Bukele.[37] He quickly clashed with the parliament to the point of putting armed soldiers in the Congress.[38] In 2021, Bukele's party won a supermajority in parliamentary elections, increasing his sway. El Salvador under Bukele is marred with arbitrary arrests and mass incarcerations, restrictions to freedom of expression, forced retirement of judges and their replacement with pro-government ones, and manipulation of term limits.[39] The latter allowed Bukele to be re-elected in 2024.[40]

The 2011 revolution in **Libya** overthrew Colonel Gaddafi's regime and led to the establishment of the National Transitional Council. The 2012 general elections were considered free and fair, and Libya was classified as electoral democracy for one year (2013). Since 2014, Libya has been engulfed in a civil war between two rival governments, each backed by various militias. New elections have been repeatedly postponed with no expectation of holding them anytime soon.

Finally, **Myanmar** is the only bell-turn autocratizer that remained autocratic throughout the whole episode. A period of liberalization under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi made it one of the major democratizers of the 2010s. Yet, the 2021 military coup swiftly turned Myanmar back into a closed autocracy. Since 2021, the junta has killed more than 6,000 people, detained more than 20,000, while more than 3,5 million are internally displaced.[41] Conflicts between rebel groups and the military have intensified since 2023,[42] and violence against the Rohingya community surges.[43] By the end of 2024, Myanmar remains one the most repressive closed autocracies in the world.

FAVORITE WEAPON: CENSORING THE MEDIA

Government efforts at censoring the media is the preferred weapon of choice against democracy among the 45 current autocratizers. Several other indicators of Freedom of Expression are also amid the most undermined, reaffirming the alarming situation for freedom of speech highlighted in Section 1. Beyond that, diminishing **elections' freedom and fairness**, and **repression of civil society** are also top choices of aspiring and established autocrats.

Figure 16 details what specific aspects are most often affected during autocratization. It shows the top 20 indicators that decline substantially and significantly in the largest number of the 45 autocratizing countries (both stand-alone and bell-turn types).

All indicators that go into any of the democracy indices are included in the analysis. For each country, the 2024 level is compared to the level the country had before autocratization set in (the years are displayed in Figure 13).

FIGURE 16. TOP 20 DECLINING INDICATORS, AUTOCRATIZING COUNTRIES, 2024

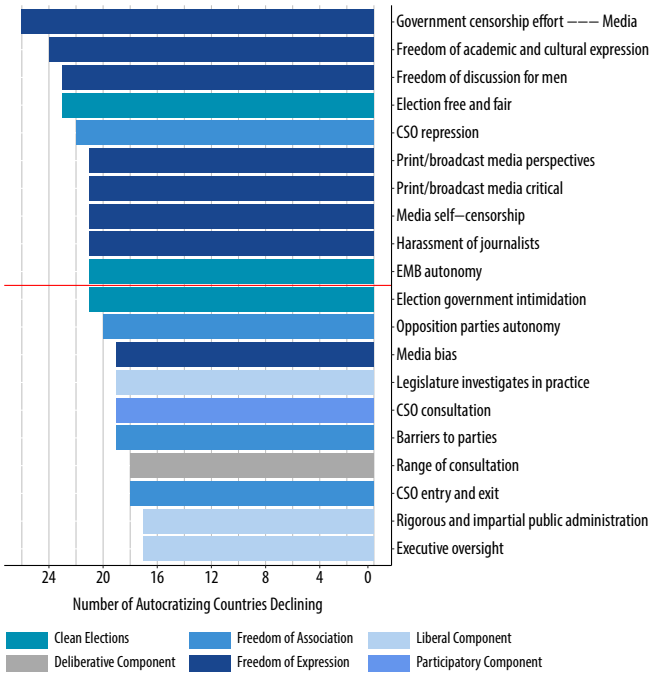


Figure 16 plots the number of autocratizing countries declining on the top 20 indicators. For technical details, see note under Figure 8.

Indicators of Freedom of Expression not only dominate the top 20 list but are also at the very top of it, confirming the distressing situation for freedom of speech highlighted in Section 1. **Government censorship efforts**, **attacks on academic and cultural expression**, and **freedom of discussion for men** are the three aspects most often under attack among the 45 current autocratizers. They decline substantially and statistically significantly in 26, 24, and 23 countries, respectively.

Nicaragua takes the first place in terms of magnitude of deteriorations on all three of these indicators. The Ortega government routinely insults and attacks journalists, criminalizes a wide range of online communications and restricts academic freedom.[44] Similarly dire is situation with freedom of expression in Myanmar, where journalists are regularly harassed and arrested and blocking of social media, news and civil society websites has become an everyday reality.[45] Other worst offenders are Afghanistan, Belarus, El Salvador, and Hungary.

Other indicators of freedom of expression include government attacks on **printed and broadcast media critical of the govern-**

36 www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/niger/report-niger/
37 www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/21/fears-for-democracy-in-el-salvador-after-president-claims-to-be-coolest-dictator
38 www.npr.org/2020/02/10/804407503/troops-occupy-el-salvadors-legislature-to-back-president-s-crime-package
39 www.journalofdemocracy.org/elections/how-the-worlds-most-popular-dictator-wins/
40 www.nytimes.com/2024/02/04/world/americas/election-el-salvador-bukele.html
41 www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/01/myanmar-four-years-after-coup-world-must-demand-accountability-for-atrocity-crimes/
42 www.voanews.com/a/myanmar-s-rebels-closing-in-around-junta-into-fifth-year-of-civil-war-/7958145.html
43 www.state.gov/four-years-from-the-military-coup-in-myanmar-joint-statement-by-australia-canada-the-european-union-the-republic-of-korea-new-zealand-norway-switzerland-the-united-kingdom-and-the-united-state/
44 PEN-International. 2024. Report on the Situation of Freedom of Expression in Nicaragua.
45 www.justiceformyanmar.org/stories/the-myanmar-juntas-partners-in-digital-surveillance-and-censorship

A protester faces with a Serbian police officer showing red painted hands symbolising government neglect and mismanagement during a protest called by student organisation "SviCe" (Rising) in Belgrade on November 3, 2024. (Andrej IsakovicAFP via Getty Images)

ment, narrowing of **perspectives offered in media**, increasing levels of **media self-censorship**, and more frequent **harassment of journalists**. They all decline in 21 autocratizing countries.

These indicators are closely related to each other and show different methods of how governments silence "disloyal" media voices, impose regulatory pressure on honest journalists, and tilt information space in their favor. Hungary is one example. Its media system has become particularly centralized and politically controlled during autocratization, creating an "informational autocracy" with full state control over public discourse.[46] Media freedom is also undermined in still democratic countries. Recent examples include Moldova, Romania, and South Korea where media bias and self-censorship are becoming increasingly more common. Unsurprisingly, harsh closed autocracies like Afghanistan and Myanmar deteriorate on all these indicators.

The indicator for **free- and fairness of elections** declined in 23 countries. This is similar to last year's *Democracy Report*, showing that elections continue to be the second most attacked aspect of democracy among autocratizing countries. Georgia, Hungary, Nicaragua, and Serbia are among the countries that registered the most substantial deteriorations among the 45 autocratizers. Notably, in Georgia, the most serious deteriorations on this indicator were registered in 2024, during the "record year of elections".

Attacks on the **Election Management Body (EMB) autonomy** are becoming increasingly more common in 21 of the 45 autocratizing countries, including Indonesia, where democracy broke down in 2024, and Romania – one of the most recent autocratizers. **Government intimidation of opposition** during election periods increased substantially in 21 countries, among them Bangladesh, Belarus, India, Pakistan, and Serbia. In sum, three of the indicators in the Clean Elections Index are found among the top 20 declining indicators, and all of them appear relatively high on the list.

Repression of civil society organization (CSOs) continues to be among the preferred weapons of choice for aspiring autocrats. It is declining in 22 countries, or almost half of the 45 autocratizing countries. Attacks on civil society are very common during autocratization. Among countries where situation for civil society has become particularly dire during the last years, we find Belarus, Central African Republic, El Salvador, and Nicaragua.

Among other Freedom of Association-indicators, **opposition parties' autonomy** is decreasing substantially in 20 countries, including Belarus, Hungary, Pakistan, and Romania. Legal and financial **barriers to forming a party** are becoming increasingly more common in 19 countries, among them Georgia, Guinea, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia. The extent to which the government controls over **entry and exit by CSOs** into public life has increased in 18 autocratizing countries, for example, in Belarus, Hong Kong, India, and Mexico. Thus, four of the top 20 declining indicators in Figure 16 belong to the Freedom of Association component.

Among the liberal aspects of democracy that are deteriorating in autocratizing countries, we find legislatures' ability to investigate wrongdoings by the government, **impartiality of public administration**, and **executive oversight**. They are deteriorating in 19, 17, and 17 countries, respectively. Countries that deteriorate on all three of these indicators include Afghanistan, Belarus, El Salvador, Haiti, Hungary, and Nicaragua.

46 Guriev, S., and D. Treisman. 2022. *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*. Princeton University Press.

Thousands of people walk the streets in Warsaw, Poland on June 4, 2023 in support of the opposition in one of the biggest marches in the country since the ruling party Law and Justice took the power in 2016. (Jakub Porzycki/ Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)

4 | Democratizing Countries

- **19 countries are in episodes of democratization. The number of democratizers has hovered between 15 and 20 since 2014.**
- **12 of the 19 democratizers started as autocracies. 9 of these transitioned to democracy. The "success rate" is 75%.**
- **Out of the 19 democratizers, 9 are "stand-alone" and 10 are "U-turn" episodes.**
- **In 6 of the 9 "stand alone" cases, democratization started in an autocracy. All 6 of them are now democracies.**
- **4 of the 10 "U-turn" cases reverted autocratization before democratic breakdown.**
- **Freedom of expression is the most common aspect to improve during democratization, closely followed by rule of law and executive oversight.**

The *Democracy Report 2025* can report a decade of stagnation in terms of how many countries are democratizing. There are 19 countries with ongoing processes of democratization in 2024 (Figure 17). Since 2014, the number of democratizers has hovered between 15 and 20, while the number of autocratizers has increased steeply (Figure 10 in Section 2).

The 19 countries are split between nine **stand-alone** – where the process of improvement starts independently, after a period of relative stability, and ten **U-turns** – where a recent period of democratization follows shortly after, and is connected to, a period of autocratization.[1]

In Figure 17, the 19 cases are grouped by the two types and then ordered by their levels on the LDI at the onset of democratization, from lowest to highest. The LDI score for 2024 reveals the magnitude of improvement by the end of 2024.

Twelve of the 19 democratizers were autocracies at the start of democratization.[2] Nine of them had transitioned to democracy by the end of 2024, a success rate of 75%.

The remaining seven democratizers were already democracies when the process got underway. Three are in processes of democratic deepening, while the other four are regaining democracy levels (U-turns).

Changes Since *Democracy Report 2024*

There are three democratizers appearing on the list this year that were not on the list in last year's *Democracy Report*: **Sri Lanka** is a stand-alone democratizer, and **Ecuador** and **Poland** are U-turns.

One stand-alone and one U-turn democratizer disappeared from the list, compared to *Democracy Report 2024*. Table 7 shows the end years of those episodes. With the cautious ERT method, it is only now that we can definitively say when these episodes ended.

TABLE 6. DEMOCRATIZERS APPEARING ON THE LIST IN 2024

	Stand-Alone	Episode Start		U-turns	Episode Start
1	Sri Lanka	2019	1	Ecuador	2016
			2	Poland	2022

TABLE 7. DEMOCRATIZERS DISAPPEARING FROM THE LIST IN 2024

	Stand-Alone	Episode End		U-turns	Episode End
1	Kosovo	2019	1	North Macedonia	2019

FIGURE 17. ALL 19 CASES OF ONGOING DEMOCRATIZATION, 2024

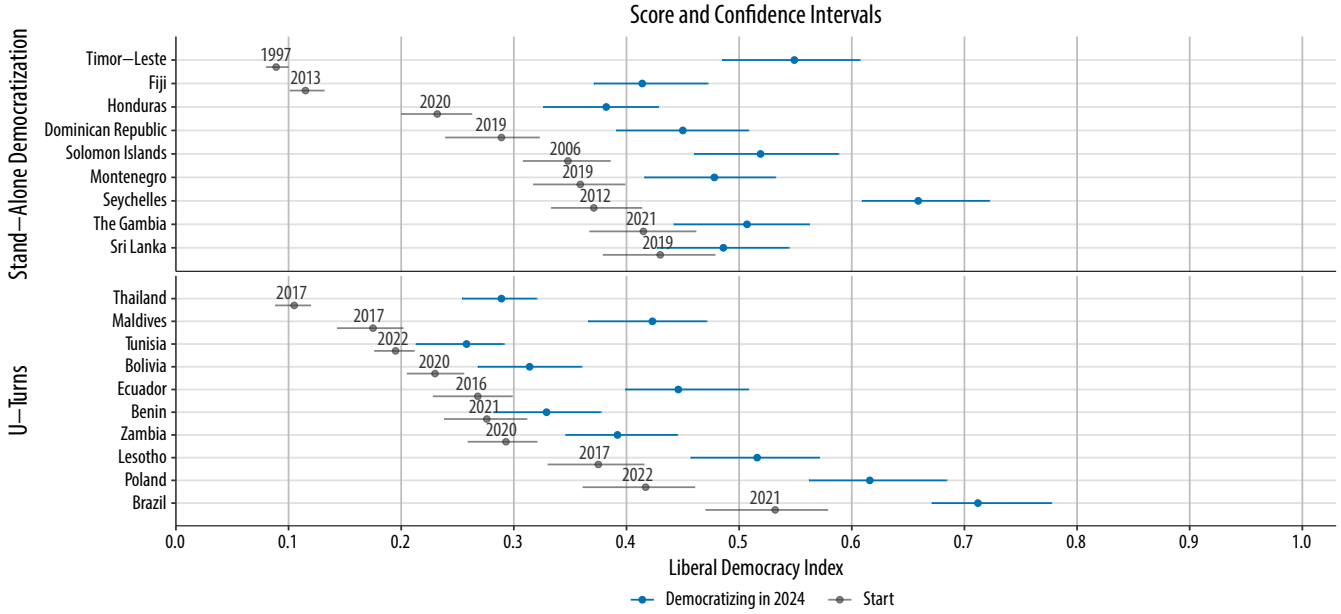


Figure 17 shows the LDI scores and confidence intervals at the start of democratization (in black). These are technically ERT "pre-episode" years, meaning that the following year was the first year recording an improvement. The LDI score at the pre-episode year is thus showing the level of democracy a country had before democratization. The values for 2024 (blue) reveal the total magnitude of change. The ERT uses the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) for identifying episodes. For consistency with the rest of the analyses in the Democracy Report, we display countries' respective values on the LDI. A country may change more on the EDI than on the LDI, which explains cases with overlapping confidence intervals (they do not overlap on the EDI)

1 Nord, M., et al. 2025. "When Autocratization is Reversed: Episodes of U-Turns since 1900". *Democratization*, online first.
2 Figure 17 does not include information on each country's regime type at the start of the episode and in 2024, but that information is found in Appendix Table A1.

In **Kosovo**, the democratization process stalled at a decent level of electoral democracy (EDI 0.65 in 2024). 2019 was the last year with substantial improvements.

The U-turn episode in **North Macedonia** ended in 2019 around its pre-autocratization levels (EDI 0.56 in 2024). However, there are some concerns regarding renewed polarization and worsening rule of law.[3]

Stand-Alone Democratization

Six of the nine stand-alone democratizers were autocracies at the beginning of their episodes. All six have transitioned to democracy – a 100% success rate.

The other three stand-alone cases were already democracies when democratization started: **Dominican Republic**, **The Gambia**, and **Sri Lanka**. They are in the process of democratic deepening.

Notably, the stand-alone democratizers are small countries with a combined population of 51 million people (or 0.6% of the world population). 22 millions of those reside in **Sri Lanka**.

Figure 18 details trajectories of the nine stand-alone democratizers from the start of their episodes to the end of 2024. Table 4 shows their rank order by the total magnitude of improvement. We start with discussing the six countries that were autocracies in the past but transitioned to democracies by 2024.

FIGURE 18. ALL 9 STAND-ALONE DEMOCRATIZERS, 2024

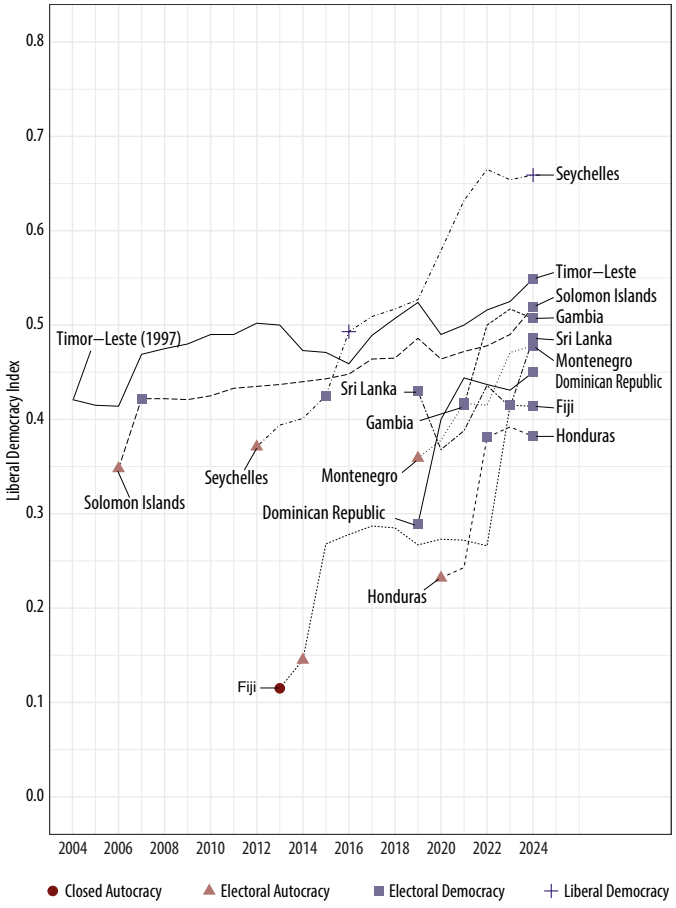


Figure 18 plots the LDI values for the nine stand-alone democratizing countries. For Timor-Leste, the first years are not shown. For technical details, see note to Figure 17.

TABLE 8. MAGNITUDE OF IMPROVEMENT, FIGURE 18

Rank	Country	Episode Start	Change on LDI
1	Fiji	2013	0.299
2	Seychelles	2012	0.288
3	Solomon Islands	2006	0.171
4	Dominican Republic	2019	0.161
5	Honduras	2020	0.150
6	Timor-Leste	1997	0.128
7	Montenegro	2019	0.119
8	The Gambia	2021	0.092
9	Sri Lanka	2019	0.056

Fiji started its democratization process in 2013 with adopting a new constitution. The return of elections in 2014 and the subsequent return of the parliament made Fiji an electoral autocracy. Further improvements followed with the 2022 elections that marked the country's first constitutional transfer of power in the 21st century.[4] Fiji transitioned to democracy in 2023.

Honduras elected its first woman president, Xiomara Castro, in 2021. The elections were largely free and fair, had a record turnout, improved the country's earlier record after a series of electoral reforms,[5] and made for a transition to democracy. The last couple of years have seen substantial advances on civil liberties and freedom of expression.[6] Notably, Honduras is going in an opposite direction from its autocratizing neighbors, El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Montenegro's democratic turn began with the 2020 elections. They ended nearly 30 years of dominance of the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS), led to a peaceful transition of power to the opposition parties that coordinated their efforts around the election, and led to a transition to democracy. Yet, corruption and polarization remain a problem.[7] Some minor improvements followed the 2023 election, when a new government was established. The country started as electoral autocracy in 2019 but is electoral democracy since 2021.

In **Solomon Islands**, the 2006 elections led to a new prime minister with a coalition of opposition parties in power. This marked a transition to democracy. Since then, democracy has been improving steadily, especially the quality of elections and freedom of association. Yet, issues with the rule of law and corruption remain a concern.[8]

The Seychelles began its democratization process in 2012 as an electoral autocracy but transitioned to become one of the two – and until recently the only – liberal democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa. It has improved its legal framework in the last decade, including revisions of the electoral code.[9] Opposition leader Wavel Ramkalawan won the presidential election in 2020, leading to the first peaceful transfer of power to the opposition since independence in 1976.

The start of **Timor-Leste**'s democratization coincides with its independency in 1999, followed by a three-year transition period under UN administration. The first elected parliament and president took office in 2001 and 2002, respectively. Since its independence, Timor-Leste has been slowly but consistently improving on democracy levels.

3 www.freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/freedom-world/2024
4 www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/case-study-fiji-gsod-2023-report
5 www.un.org/peacebuilding/es/content/success-story-honduras
6 www.srfreedex.org/statement-by-irene-khan-on-her-visit-to-honduras-16-27-october-2023/
7 www.freedomhouse.org/country/montenegro/nations-transit/2021
8 www.freedomhouse.org/country/solomon-islands/freedom-world/2024
9 www.constitutionnet.org/news/seychelles-parliament-approves-constitutional-amendment-elections; www.idea.int/news/seychelles-preparing-snap-elections

Three countries that were already democracies at the start of their episodes are now in processes of democratic deepening:

In the **Dominican Republic**, deepening of democracy followed the election of President Luis Abinader in 2020. He has conducted a series of constitutional reforms, including some that seek to safeguard the independence of the judiciary and to guarantee the alternation of power.[10] After his re-election in 2024, he is now on his last term in office.[11]

The Gambia began its democratization process in 2021. Ushered in by the first democratic transfer of power in the 2016 presidential election, President Barrow was reelected in 2021. His policies included an increase in transparency, freedom of expression, and freedom of association.[12] However, the LDI declined slightly in 2023 and 2024, reflecting President Barrow's arrests of journalists and political opponents.[13] If such developments continue, they could threaten The Gambia's democratic process.

In **Sri Lanka**, democratic improvements coincide with the economic crisis in 2019 leading to high inflation, sovereign default, and austerity measures. The 2022 public protests, spurred by the economic chaos, led to mass resignations across the government and President Gotabaya Rajapaksa fleeing the country, ending 20 years of rule by one family.[14] The government has since brought about relative stability, although still curtailing civil liberties.[15] Sri Lankans elected Anura Kumara Dissanayake (AKD) president in September 2024, the first from non-traditional parties. Following his election, AKD called for early parliamentary elections where the party he had founded in 2019 – the National People's Power (NPP) – won a supermajority.[16]

U-Turn Democratization

U-turns are countries that were autocratizing in the recent past but are now registering substantial improvements on democracy levels. They can be thought of as cases of *"stopped and reversed autocratization"*, or democratic turnarounds.[17]

There are ten ongoing U-turns in 2024. Four of them have either restored or even slightly improved their levels of democracy – **Ecuador**, **Lesotho**, **The Maldives**, and **Zambia**.

The other six – **Benin**, **Bolivia**, **Brazil**, **Poland**, **Thailand**, and **Tunisia** – are still below their starting levels, and some substantially so. However, these processes are still *ongoing* as of 2024, and the situation may change in the future.

Four countries – **Brazil**, **Ecuador**, **Lesotho**, and **Poland** – halted and reversed autocratization before a democratic breakdown, exhibiting *breakdown resilience*.[18]

In three countries – **Bolivia**, **The Maldives**, and **Zambia** – democracy broke down for a short period of time, but was restored in a U-turn episode, demonstrating *"bounce-back" resilience*.[19]

Two countries – **Benin** and **Tunisia** – were democracies about a decade ago but then suffered democratic breakdowns. Recent improvements are minor, and they remain electoral autocracies, substantially below their starting levels.

FIGURE 19. ALL 10 U-TURN DEMOCRATIZERS, 2024

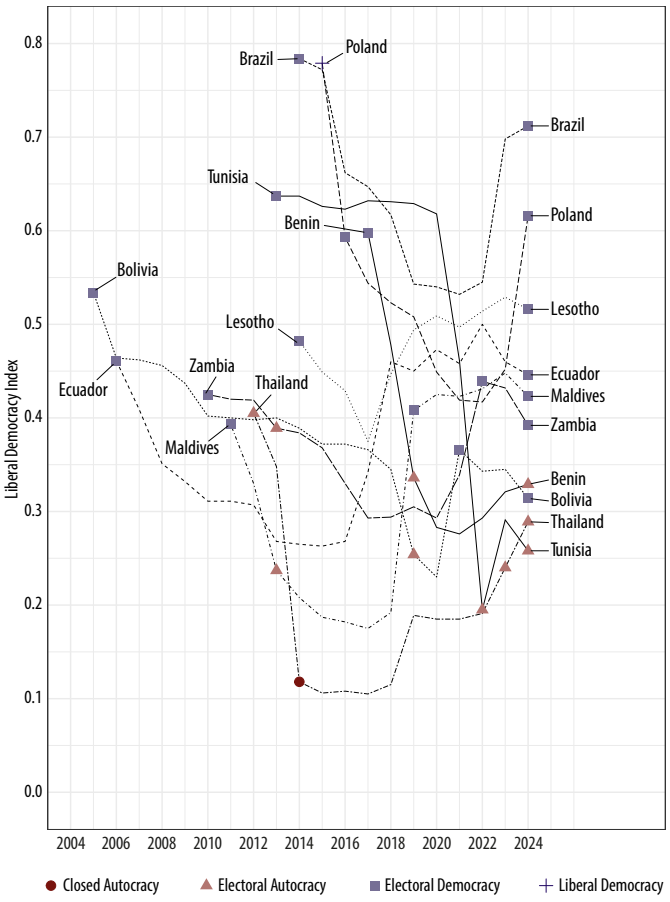


Figure 19 plots the LDI values for the 10 U-turn democratizing countries. For technical details, see note under Figure 17.

Thailand remained autocratic throughout the whole U-turn episode. Autocratic regression led to closed autocracy, but the U-turn process made it back into an electoral autocracy by the end of 2024.

Figure 19 shows trajectories on the LDI for the ten U-turns. Countries' ranking in terms of magnitude of improvements during the U-turn democratization are presented in Table 9.

TABLE 9. MAGNITUDE OF IMPROVEMENT, FIGURE 19

Rank	Country	Episode Start	Change on LDI
1	Maldives	2017	0.248
2	Poland	2022	0.199
3	Thailand	2017	0.184
4	Brazil	2021	0.180
5	Ecuador	2016	0.178
6	Lesotho	2017	0.141
7	Zambia	2020	0.099
8	Bolivia	2020	0.084
9	Tunisia	2022	0.063
10	Benin	2021	0.053

10 www.idea.int/democracytracker/country/dominican-republic
11 www.cnnespanol.cnn.com/2024/10/19/asamblea-nacional-republica-dominicana-reformas-constitucion-orix/
12 www.rsf.org/en/country/gambia, www.dw.com/en/free-speech-is-gambia-sliding-back-into-dictatorship/a-67053483
13 www.article19.org/resources/the-gambia-crackdown-on-free-speech-must-stop/
14 www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62160227
15 www.freedomhouse.org/country/sri-lanka/freedom-world/2024
16 www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/sri-lankas-peaceful-revolution/
17 Nord, M., et al. 2025. When Autocratization is Reversed: Episodes of U-Turns since 1900. *Democratization*, online first.
18 Boese, V., et al. 2021. How Democracies Prevail: Democratic Resilience as a Two-Stage Process. *Democratization* 28(5).
19 Nord, M. and S.I. Lindberg. 2025. U-Turns – The Hope for Democratic Resilience. V-Dem Institute Policy Brief 42.

Box 6. Half of *All* Autocratization Episodes are Turned Around

Recent events in **Brazil**, **Poland**, and **Zambia** demonstrate that autocratization can be halted and reversed. A new article offers a first systematic empirical overview of patterns and developments of all U-turns from 1900–2023, differentiating between three types: authoritarian manipulation, democratic reaction, and international intervention. The data on U-Turn episodes opens new avenues for understanding why some processes of autocratization trigger a successful pro-democratic backlash. The analysis shows:

- **102 U-turn episodes in 69 countries, 1900–2023.**
- **52% of all episodes of autocratization become U-turns.**
- **73% are turned around in the last 30 years.**
- **90% lead to restored or even improved levels of democracy.**

DEMOCRATIZATION
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RESEARCH ARTICLE
OPEN ACCESS
When autocratization is reversed: episodes of U-Turns since 1900
Marina Nord, Fabio Angiolillo, Martin Lundstedt, Felix Wiebrecht and Staffan I. Lindberg
ABSTRACT
The world is in a "wave of autocratization." Yet, recent events in Brazil, the Maldives, and Zambia demonstrate that autocratization can be halted and reversed. This article introduces "U-Turn" as a new type of regime transformation episode in which autocratization is closely followed by and linked to subsequent democratization. Drawing on earlier literature, it provides a general conceptualization and operationalization of this type of episode, complementing the existing Episodes of Regime Transformation (ERT) framework. The accompanying database provides descriptions for all 102 U-Turn episodes from 1900 to 2023, differentiating between three types: authoritarian manipulation, democratic reaction, and international intervention. The analysis presents a systematic empirical overview of patterns and developments of U-Turns. A key finding is that 52% of all autocratization episodes become U-Turns, which increases to 73% when focusing on the last 30 years. The vast majority of U-Turns (90%) lead to restored or even improved levels of democracy. The data on U-Turn episodes opens up new avenues for research on autocratization and democratization that were previously treated as isolated processes, particularly it could help us understand why some processes of autocratization trigger a successful pro-democratic backlash – a critical question during the starkest-ever wave of autocratization.
ARTICLE HISTORY Received 19 May 2024; Accepted 28 December 2024
KEYWORDS Democracy; autocratization; democratic resistance; turnaround; U-Turn

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The *Democracy Report* does not provide explanations about why only some countries successfully halt and revert autocratization, however, some ideas can be found elsewhere.[20]

Among the four countries where autocratization was halted and reversed before democratic breakdown, **Brazil**'s autocratization began in 2016, after the impeachment of former president Dilma Rousseff. Amidst instability and societal polarization, right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro was elected president in 2018. Attacks on the media,[21] attempts to undermine elections, and conflicts with the legislature and the judiciary followed.[22] Autocratization was halted and reversed when opposition candidate Luis Inácio "Lula" da Silva defeated Bolsonaro at the ballot in 2022. Democracy has rebound even if not fully to previous levels.

In **Ecuador**, autocratization took hold under President Rafael Correa (2007–2017).[23] After succeeding Correa in 2017, President Lenín Moreno restored presidential term limits, fired the cabinet handpicked by Correa, and reformed the laws that placed limits on media and civil society.[24] A few turbulent years with President Guillermo Lasso (2021–2023), ended with *"muerte cruzada"*, a constitutional measure that both impeaches the president and dissolves the National Assembly.[25] The 2023 snap election brought center-right candidate Daniel Noboa to power, in a context of rising levels of internal violence and activity by organized crimes.[26] Noboa has taken a tough approach to combat drug cartels and transnational crime gangs,[27] but Ecuador remains electoral democracy by 2024.

Lesotho's autocratization process started in 2014-2015, when the first-in-history coalition government collapsed, the military attempted to overthrow the government, and a series of politically motivated assassinations followed. Rule of law was weak and polarization between the ruling elites was rising.[28] Prime Minister Thabane was eventually forced to resign by his own party. A period of reforms started in 2018-2019, which marked significant liberalization and the reversal of the autocratization process. The 2022 general elections were hailed as free and fair.[29] Lesotho has fully restored its initial democracy level and even slightly improved further by 2024.

Poland is a U-turn that started in a liberal democracy in 2015. It then became one of the top 10 autocratizers as the national-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party gradually dismantled the judicial system, installed loyal allies in key positions, systematically intimidated opposition and the media, while using the Constitutional Court to protect ministers against the justice system.[30] The 2023 election brought a coalition government led by Donald Tusk to power. They have largely undone state capture of public media and have restored freedom of expression,[31] but have not yet managed to restore independence of the judiciary and civil liberties.[32] As of 2024, Poland remains significantly below its 2015 democracy levels.

There are three cases where democracy broke down for a short time but was restored quickly in a U-turn episode.

The democratic decline in **Bolivia** was gradual under President Evo Morales (2006-2019) and his party Movement for Socialism (MAS). Democratic breakdown came after the 2019 national elections when allegations of electoral fraud, massive popular protests, international pressure, and the withdraw of support from the military forced Evo Morales to resign and self-exile. Jeanine Áñez, the second vice-president of the Senate (and the highest official remaining), declared herself President. The 2019 election results were annulled, and after a year of institutional instability, new elections were held in 2020, and Luis Arce from MAS was elected president. In 2021, Bolivia restored its status as electoral democracy, but the progress has stalled since. In 2024, there was an unsuccessful coup attempt.[33] While still a U-turn, Bolivia has further declined on the LDI in 2024, and the 2025 elections may determine the future of its democracy.

The Maldives has been swung between being pro-China or pro-India since independence in 2008. Autocratization started when the pro-China candidate Abdulla Yameen won the 2013 election.[34] Opposition critics were met with crackdowns, restrictions on freedom of speech, civil liberties, and the judiciary.[35] Public dissatisfaction led to Yameen losing presidency to the pro-India candidate Ibrahim Solih in 2018 who restored democratic rights and freedoms.[36] The relatively free and fair 2019 parliamentary elections led to the regaining of status as electoral democracy. In 2023, the pro-China candidate

20 Nord, M. and S.I. Lindberg. 2025. U-Turns – The Hope for Democratic Resilience. V-Dem Institute Policy Brief 42.
21 www.rsf.org/en/bolsonaro-family-vents-more-anger-ever-brazil-s-media
22 www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/10/25/world/americas/brazil-bolsonaro-misinformation.html
23 Conaghan, C.M. 2016. "Delegative Democracy Revisited: Ecuador Under Correa". *Journal of Democracy 27(3)*.
24 Freeman, W. 2023. "Ecuador's Democratic Breakdown". *Journal of Democracy*, online exclusive.
25 www.vox.com/world-politics/2023/4/30/23705442/ecuador-lasso-political-corruption
26 www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/ecuador
27 www.plenglish.com/news/2025/02/28/ecuadors-next-legislature-may-decide-on-military-bases/
28 Deleglise, D. 2018. The Rise and Fall of Lesotho's Coalition Governments. Africa Dialogue Monograph Series No. 1/2018.
29 www.freedomhouse.org/country/thailand/freedom-world/2024
30 www.carnegieendowment.org/europe/strategic-europe/2023/06/judy-asks-is-polands-democracy-in-danger?lang=en
31 www.cer.eu/insights/difficulties-restoring-democracy-poland
32 www.americanprogress.org/article/polands-democratic-resurgence-from-backsliding-to-beacon/
33 www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/can-bolivia-ever-escape-the-coup-trap/
34 www.asiapacific.ca/sites/default/files/publication-pdf/Insight_SA_Feb24_V2.pdf
35 www.hrw.org/report/2018/08/16/all-out-assault-democracy/crushing-dissent-maldives
36 www.freedomhouse.org/country/maldives/freedom-world/2024

Mohamed Muizzu became president, and in 2024, his party won control of the parliament by landslide.[37] As of 2024, the U-turn episode is still ongoing and The Maldives remains electoral democracy.

The autocratization process in **Zambia** can be traced back to 2011-2012, and it became electoral autocracy in 2013. The regression deepened with the election of Edgar Lungu from the Patriotic Front (PF) as President.[38] The 2020 economic crisis led to a decline in support for the PF, and opposition leaders coalescing with civil society groups mobilized citizens against the government in the 2021 election. Hakainde Hichilema from the United Party for National Development (UPND) won, marking the start of the re-democratization period. Zambia transitioned back to electoral democracy in 2022. Yet, concerns about human rights, and journalists' and opposition's freedom of speech have resurfaced.[39] Despite the decline of the last two years, the U-turn episode is not yet marked as terminated. Zambia remains electoral democracy, as of 2024.

In two U-turn cases democratic breakdown and a sharp decline on democracy levels was followed by some minor liberalization. These improvements, however, run only skin deep so far.

In **Benin**, the process of rapid autocratization started under President Talon, elected in relatively free and fair elections in 2016. Within less than five years, he transformed Benin from one of the most stable democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa into a dictatorship.[40] An incremental liberalization process started in 2022, when the government released several opponents from jail and allowed opposition parties to participate in the upcoming elections. The 2023 election brought Benin's opposition back to parliament with 24% of the seats.[41] 2024 was marked by an alleged coup attempt against President Talon and the spread of rumors that he might be preparing for a third term in 2026.[42] As of 2024, Benin remains an electoral autocracy.

Tunisia was the most promising case of the Arab Spring and remained electoral democracy throughout most of the 2010s. In 2021, President Saïed initiated a self-coup and rapid autocratization. He dissolved parliament, postponed elections, issued a new constitution, and de facto started to rule by decree.[43] Attacks on civil society and media freedom were common, dozens of prominent opposition politicians, civil society figures, and journalists were arrested,[44] and democracy broke down. In 2022-2023, parliamentary elections were held followed by presidential elections in 2024, both boycotted by most parties. By the end of 2024, Tunisia remains an electoral autocracy.

Finally, **Thailand** is the only U-turn case that remained autocracy throughout the whole episode. The 2014 coup established a military dictatorship under the National Council for Peace and Order, and Thailand was a closed autocracy for five years. The 2019 general elections marked first signs of liberalization. The 2023 election were more competitive but the opposition party, Move Forward, was blocked from forming a government by the Senate controlled by the military.[45] In August 2024, the Constitutional Court dissolved the Move Forward Party and banned its leaders from politics for ten years, while Prime Minister Thavisin was dismissed.[46] By the end of 2024, Thailand remains an electoral autocracy.

GATEWAYS TO DEMOCRATIZATION

Which specific aspects of democracy most commonly improve during democratization? Three indicators that go into the Freedom of Expression Index occupy the top spots: **Government censorship efforts of the media** is reduced in almost two-thirds of all cases, **freedom of academic and cultural expression** expands substantially in about half of the processes, and **harassment of journalists** begins to cease in almost as many. These aspects seem to be key to initiate democratization. Beyond that, rule of law and checks and balances also come out as critical in many cases, such as **increasing high court independence** and strengthening **executive oversight** by the legislature.

Figure 20 shows the top 20 indicators that most frequently improve in the 19 democratizing countries. Overall, different aspects of freedom of expression seem to be important across many current processes of democratization. More than half of all democratizers are improving on the three indicators that occupy the top spots in Figure 20. Freedom of expression is often the first to be attacked during autocratization (see Figure 16), but also the first to improve during democratization.

Government censorship efforts of the media declines substantially and statistically significantly in 12 out of 19 democratizing countries (or 63%). Among countries that register the most notable declines, are Fiji, The Maldives, and Poland. Timor-Leste takes the first place on the list in terms of magnitude of improvements. This is not

FIGURE 20. TOP 20 IMPROVING INDICATORS, DEMOCRATIZING COUNTRIES, 2024

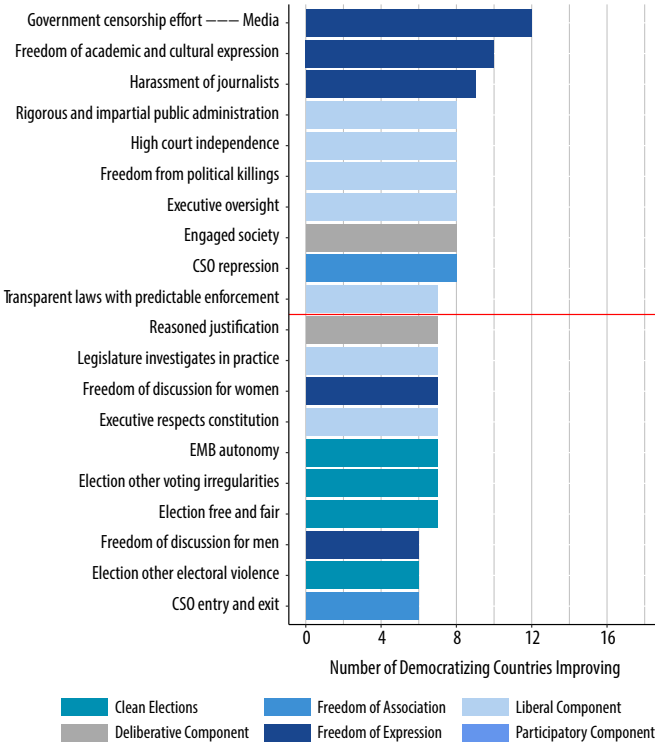


Figure 20 plots the number of democratizing countries improving on the top 20 indicators. For technical details, see note under Figure 8.

37 www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-68852720
38 Resnick, D. 2022. How Zambia's Opposition Won. *Journal of Democracy* 33 (1).
39 www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/zambia
40 www.freedomhouse.org/country/benin/freedom-world/2024
41 www.electionguide.org/elections/id/4033/
42 www.republic.com.ng/december-24-january-25/benin-alleged-coup-plot/
43 www.carnegieendowment.org/emissary/2024/09/tunisia-presidential-election-saied-candidates-jailed?lang=en
44 www.freedomhouse.org/country/tunisia/freedom-world/2024
45 www.freedomhouse.org/country/thailand/freedom-world/2024
46 www.commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10141/

surprising given that democratization episode in that country has been ongoing for almost 30 years already.

Second on the top 20 list is the **freedom of academic and cultural expression**, improving in ten out of the 19 countries undergoing democratization, including Brazil, Dominican Republic, Lesotho, Thailand, and Timor-Leste. **Harassment of journalists** takes the third place and is declining in nine democratizing countries. Dominican Republic and Poland register the most encouraging improvements.

The second most important component in many of the now ongoing democratization processes seems to be liberal aspects that strengthen rule of law and executive oversight. No less than seven indicators in this area appear on the top 20 list. Indicators of **rigorous and impartial administration**, **high court independence**, **freedom of political killings**, and **executive oversight** improve substantially and significantly in eight countries each. Poland and The Seychelles improve substantially and significantly on all of them.

Transparent laws with predictable enforcement, **legislative investigations**, and **executive respect for the constitution** increase in seven countries each, with Brazil, Fiji, and The Maldives improving on all of them.

Unsurprisingly, improving on the quality of elections also appears to be an important aspect during democratization. Four of the top 20 indicators in Figure 20 measure different aspects of clean elections. Among them, the **Election Management Body (EMB) autonomy** and **free- and fairness of elections** are significantly improving in seven countries each. Montenegro and Timor-Leste register the most notable improvement in terms of the EMB autonomy, while Honduras and Thailand advance substantially in terms of free- and fairness of their elections.

Two indicators from the deliberative aspect of democracy capturing the quality of debate and respect for opponents are on the top 20 list – **engaged society** and **reasoned justification**. The extent to which **society is engaged** in deliberation on policy and the extent to which politicians provide **reasoned justification** for their actions are improving in eight and seven democratizing countries, respectively. The improvements on these indicators are closely related, and seven out of eight countries improve on both indicators, including Brazil, Poland, Thailand, and Zambia.

Finally, among the indicators of freedom of association, **repression of civil society organization (CSOs)** and the extent to which government **controls entry and exit of CSOs** into public life are declining in eight and six countries, respectively. This suggests that strategies aimed at reducing **repression of civil society** are also very important for democratization. Ecuador, The Maldives, and Zambia are examples of countries that have seen improvements on both indicators.

La Paz, Bolivia, November 15, 2019: People demonstrate against the burning and removing of the Wiphala flag. (Radoslaw Czajkowski via Shutterstock)

BOX 7. PORTUGAL'S CARNATION REVOLUTION – 50 YEARS

by Professor Tiago Fernandes, V-Dem Regional Manager for Southern Europe, University Institute of Lisbon

2024 marked the 50th anniversary of the Portugal's Carnation Revolution which ended Europe's longest-lasting dictatorship, led the country to democracy and initiated the "third wave of democratization".[1]

The Portuguese revolution of 1974–75 was in many ways unique.

First, unlike other social revolutions of the modern era, it gave way directly to a democratic regime. Other major social revolutions have either failed and been overthrown by counter-revolutionary movements (Germany, 1918–19; the Spanish civil war of 1936–39), or when successful, have generated revolutionary single-party regimes (Russia, 1917; Cuba, 1950s; Nicaragua, 1979).

Social revolutions of the democratic type are an exception. France in 1789-93 was one such case, although the impact of the French Revolution on democratization was discontinuous, with France only reaching the threshold of a democratic regime in the 1870s. The Tunisian Jasmine Revolution (2010-11) that sparked the Arab Spring was another promising case; yet its successes have already faltered as the country reverted to a more autocratic model during the last years.

Second, the democracy born out of the Portuguese revolution proved to be robust. Portugal has not suffered serious regime crises or episodes of democratic regression like both third wave (e.g., Brazil, Hungary, and South Korea) or older democracies (e.g., the USA).

Yet, the last five-six years' decreasing media pluralism, transparency and enforcement of laws, access to justice, and even reduced legislative control and opposition oversight of the executive captured by V-Dem data, are worrying. Also, the far-right is third largest in parliament since 2020 but the center-right and center-left have so far blocked its participation in government. Maybe this is helped by that in some dimensions, such as social inclusion and the welfare state, Portugal performs better than comparable cases like Spain, Greece, and Italy.[2]

Finally, the Portuguese revolution set in motion the "third wave of democratization", which then reached Spain, Greece and dozens of other countries in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia and the Pacific, and Africa.

SO, WHY DID THE PORTUGUESE REVOLUTION GIVE RISE TO A DEMOCRACY?

We compared the Portuguese revolution of 1974 with earlier 20th century European revolutionary cycles[3], since it was the last great European revolution of the 20th century.

We argue that the democratic outcome of the Portuguese revolution was the result of four factors:

- The existence of a robust moderate opposition, already rooted in civil society during the later stages of the authoritarian regime, which during the intense mobilization of the revolution was able to build strong center-left and center-right parties that last to this day;

Hand of person holding a flower in a demonstration celebrating the 50th anniversary of Portugal's Carnation Revolution, April 2024. (Nascimento Vieira/Pexels)

- Ideological and cultural scripts available in Europe since the early 1960s, which allowed for a fusion of socialism and liberalism, providing a credible alternative to Leninist-Stalinist models;
- A high level of professionalization of the military, a legacy of Portugal's NATO membership and paradoxically of the colonial wars themselves (1961–1974), making it possible to form an alliance between military and civilian moderates;
- The benign international context of the détente, where the two major world powers (USA and the USSR) abstained from direct military intervention.

Some of the conditions that led to the outbreak of great social revolutions are reappearing today, like the global spread of neo-patrimonialism; the efforts at reconstructing empires; increasing socio-economic inequalities; and trends towards autocratization both in democratic and hybrid regimes.

Therefore, the Portuguese case is highly relevant today providing clues for understanding the conditions under which future revolutionary cycles may give rise to democracy.

1 Huntington, S. 1991. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma Press.
2 Fishman, R. 2019. *Democratic Practice: Origins of the Iberian Divide in Political Inclusion*. Oxford University Press; Fernandes, T., (ed.) 2024. *Democratic Quality in Southern Europe: France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain*. University of Notre Dame Press.
3 Fernandes, T. 2024. Portugal, 1974–1975. Revolution, Counterrevolution and Democracy. Lisbon, FFMS.

Box 8. Disinformation and Polarization Fuel Autocratization – Democratizers Counter

- **Half of all autocratizing governments increasingly spread disinformation. Polarization is increasing in a quarter of *all* countries, often to toxic levels. Mutually reinforcing, they fuel autocratization**
- **Conversely, successful democratizers often reduce disinformation substantially. Recent U-turns enabled by substantial decreases in Brazil, Poland, and Zambia are examples.**

Disinformation, polarization, and autocratization often go hand in hand and mutually reinforce each other – and to some extent the other way around for democratization. With a simple comparison of means, Figure 1 shows that government disinformation and political polarization increase in autocratizing countries.

By contrast, in democratizing countries, especially levels of disinformation tend to go down. The mirroring of the associations from autocratization to democratization is surprisingly clear.

Disinformation and Polarization Threaten Democracy

Governments in autocratic countries habitually use disinformation to influence citizens domestically and abroad. How autocratization is fueled by disinformation and polarization is more and more well-known. Disinformation has become a favorite instrument of modern autocrats (e.g. **Russia** scores close to the maximum on this indicator),[1] and studies suggest that polarization often becomes an aid for governments to spread disinformation undermining democracy.[2]

Thus, disinformation is used by autocratizing governments to purposefully inflate negative feelings and create a sense of distrust within the society, fueling polarization. Polarization also erodes trust in government institutions.[3] Thus, it becomes easier to promote state propaganda, discredit opposition, and garner support for policies further undermining democracy.[4] If polarization is high, citizens are more willing to trade off democratic principles for other interests or to help their side win. The "Brexit" vote and the 2016 USA presidential election are two prominent examples where this pattern played out.[5]

How democratization is enabled by and/or leads to cessation of disinformation and at times polarization is not known. We know that countering disinformation around the 2022 elections in Brazil was instrumental to the halting of autocratization and turning it around to re-democratize (see *Democracy Report 2024*), and it seems to have played a role in Poland and Zambia as well. This is an area where more research is needed.

Disinformation and Polarization on the Rise

Patterns among the V-Dem data at country-level provide some additional evidence of these relationships (Figure 2). In 31 countries, governments increasingly resort to disinformation and two-thirds – 21 out of 31 – are autocratizing, such as **El Salvador**, **Georgia**, **Hungary**, **India**, and **Serbia** (left panel, Figure 2).

Polarization is substantially and significantly increasing in 45 countries, or a quarter of all countries in the world (right panel of Figure 2). In more than half of them (*N*=24), it has already reached toxic levels (approximately upper one-third on the scale).[6] Most autocratizing countries have toxic levels of polarization, including **Hungary**, **India**, and **Peru**. The same goes for several other countries where the V-Dem data shows worrying early signs of autocratization, such as **Slovenia** and **Slovakia**.

FIGURE 1. DISINFORMATION AND POLARIZATION, MEAN CHANGES BY 2024

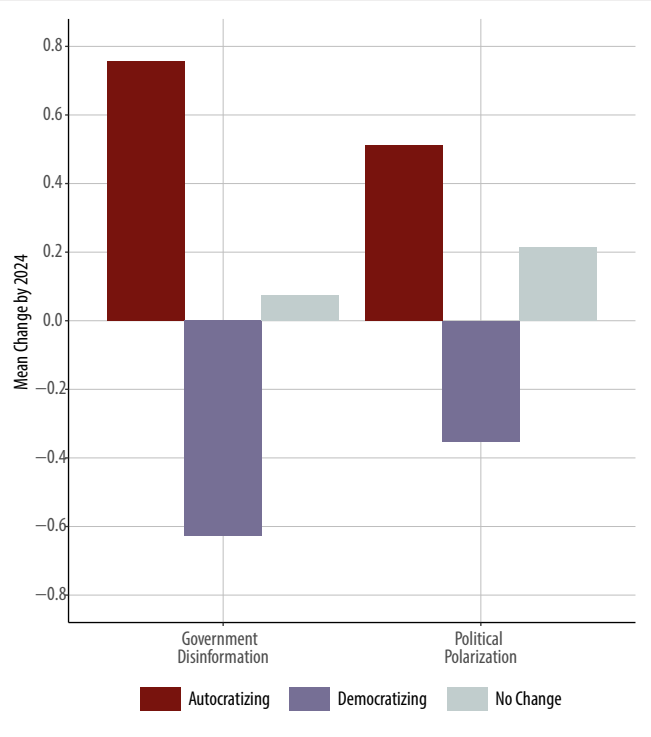


Figure 1 shows mean changes in levels of disinformation and polarization by 2024. For autocratizing and democratizing countries, the year of reference is the onset year of the episode, by the ERT methodology. Other countries are compared to their 2014 levels. Government's disinformation measures how often governments and their agents use social media to disseminate misleading viewpoints or false information. Political polarization measures the extent to which society is polarized into antagonistic political camps where political differences affect social relationships.

More than half (*N*=28) of all countries affected by increasing political polarization are democracies. Liberal democracies account for almost one third of all countries with increasing political polarization (*N*=14). In two of them – **France** and the **USA** – polarization has reached toxic levels. Democracies are thus not immune to polarization threats.

The good news is that in seven democratizing countries substantial decreases in spreading of disinformation goes hand in hand with democratization. In the recent U-turn in **Brazil**, for example, targeted countering of disinformation regarding the elections was a key factor in the process as discussed in last year's *Democracy Report*.

Disinformation and Polarization Go Hand in Hand

The relationship between increasing spread of disinformation, increasing polarization, and then autocratization also shows over time within countries. Figure 3 shows that pattern with three examples among the top autocratizing countries listed in Section 3 – **Hungary**, **Nicaragua**, and **Serbia**.

1 Guriev, S. and D. Treisman. 2022. *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century*. Princeton University Press.
2 Keller, F. et al. 2020. "Political Astroturfing on Twitter: How to Coordinate a Disinformation Campaign". *Political Communication 37(2).*
3 Osmundsen, M., et al. 2021. "Partisan Polarization is the Primary Psychological Motivation Behind Political Fake News on Twitter". *American Political Science Review 115(3).*
4 McCoy, J. and M. Somer. 2019. "Towards a Theory of Pernicious Polarization and How It Harms Democracies: Comparative Evidence and Possible Remedies". *The ANNALS of the AAPSS 681(1).*
5 Rose, J. 2017. "Brexit, Trump, and Post-Truth Politics". *Public Integrity 19(6).*
6 Toxic levels of political polarization endanger democracy. Political polarization shows to which extent the society is divided into antagonistic "Us" versus "Them" camps on political issues. When it reaches toxic levels, the division on political issues is so high and so permeated in the society, that political differences start to affect social and family relationships, far beyond political discussion.

Mutually reinforcing, levels of polarization, parties' use of hate speech, and governments' spread of disinformation increase over time and then autocratization follows (as indicated by the downturns on the LDI). Anti-pluralist leaders and parties' agendas benefit from and make use of disinformation and polarization to do away with democracy. Current developments in the **USA** are yet another case where this dynamic seems to be at play (see Box 9).

For democratizers, levels of disinformation tend to go down together with democratization (see Figure 4). Recent U-turns – **Brazil** and **Poland** – show the clearest pattern. The link between polarization and democratization seems to be less clear. Polarization fuels autocratization, but democratization does not automatically reduce polarization.

FIGURE 2. DISINFORMATION AND POLARIZATION, 2024

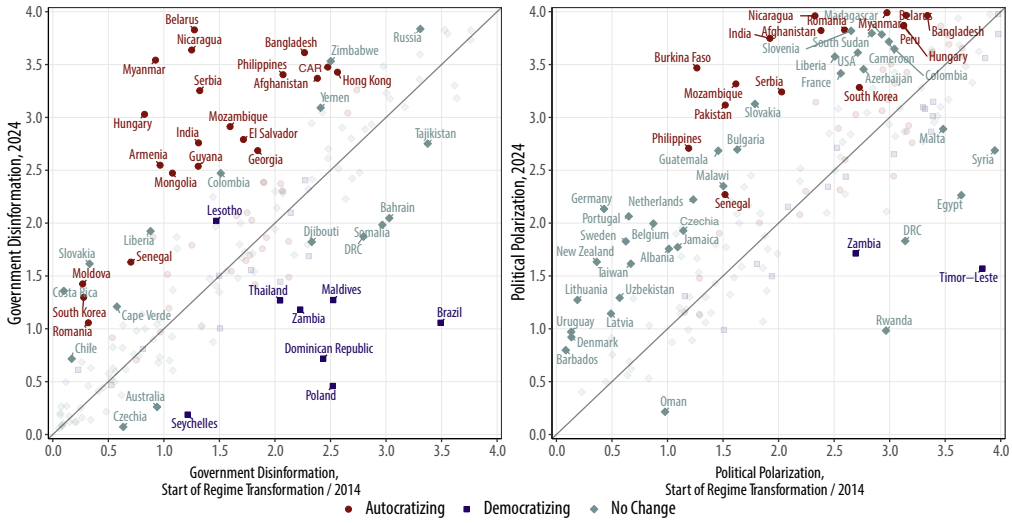


Figure 2 plots countries' changes in levels of disinformation (left panel) and polarization (right panel) by 2024. For autocratizing and democratizing countries, the year of reference is the onset year of the episode, by the ERT methodology (see Figures 13 and 17). The reference year for other countries is ten years ago (2014). A change is substantial and significant if its 2024 value is at least 0.5 point (on a scale from 0 to 4) different from the reference year, and the confidence intervals do not overlap.

FIGURE 3. DISINFORMATION AND POLARIZATION IN THREE AUTOCRATIZING COUNTRIES, 2004–2024

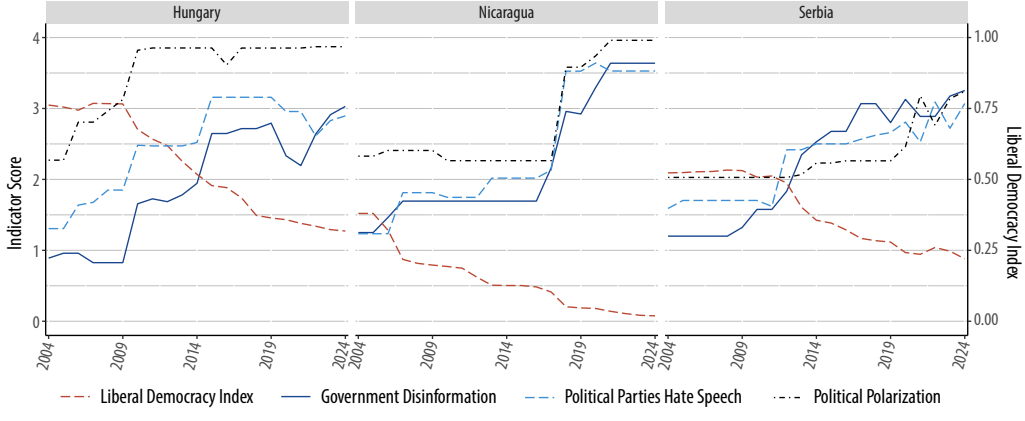


Figure 3 left y-axis indicates the score for the disinformation and polarization indicators. Higher scores for disinformation, polarization, and political parties hate speech indicate higher levels of disinformation/polarization, respectively. The right y-axis represents the scale for the LDI.

FIGURE 4. DISINFORMATION AND POLARIZATION IN THREE DEMOCRATIZING COUNTRIES, 2004–2024

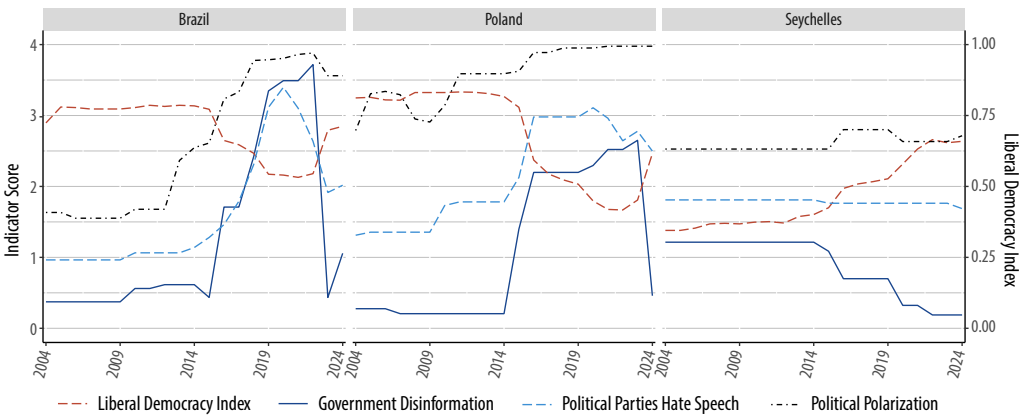


Figure 4 left y-axis indicates the score for the disinformation and polarization indicators. Higher score for disinformation, polarization, and political parties hate speech indicate higher levels of disinformation/polarization, respectively. The right y-axis represents the scale for the LDI.

Voters wait outside a voting station for polls to open in the fishing village of Ndayane on November 17, 2024, during Senegal's parliamentary elections. (John Wessels/AFP via Getty Images)

5 | The 2024 "Year of Elections" in Review

- **The 2024 year of elections overall did neither "break" nor "make" it for democracy. The global trends remain largely unchanged.**
- **Out of 61 countries holding elections, only 11 countries changed their trajectories.**
- **Overall, there were slightly more countries with negative (7) than positive (4) changes of trajectories.**
- **Increasing political violence and pro-democracy mobilization are the most visible trends of the 2024 year of elections.**

The 2024 "year of elections" was neither a "make" nor "break" year for democracy. There were slightly more countries (seven) where the election year 2024 ended with negative outcomes than positive (four) but for most countries, the election year meant "more of the same". Overall, the year did nothing to change the fact that the world is in a third wave of autocratization.

Increasing political violence came out as a notable trend among elections in 2024, indicating that authoritarian leaders increasingly resort to repression to retain power.

On the positive side, mobilization for democracy increased in a number of countries holding elections, and in a smaller number of countries elections gave democracy a clear boost, demonstrating the potential for a reversal.

Changes in Trajectories With the 2024 Election-Year

A lot was at stake in the "record year of elections" 2024. Citizens in 61 countries with the total population of 3.8 billion people could cast their votes[1] and, among the countries that held elections, there were seven of the world's ten most populous states: **Bangladesh**, **India**, **Indonesia**, **Mexico**, **Pakistan**, **Russia**, and the **USA**. There were also 30 countries holding elections where democracy was already in decline, and where elections could make a difference.

Painting broad-brush picture, 50 out of the 61 countries did not see any immediate major changes for countries' trajectories on democracy with the 2024 election year, while seven had substantial negative outcomes and four had positive outcomes.[2]

Table 10 details the outcome of the 2024 elections grouping countries by RoW category in 2023.

One of the 13 **liberal democracies** had a positive outcome: **Czechia** that entered the democratizers "watchlist".[3]

Among the 23 **electoral democracies**, there were two positive outcomes – **Botswana** and **Sri Lanka**, and three negative outcomes **Georgia**, **Moldova**, and **Slovakia**. Botswana successfully halted autocratization and Sri Lanka even reversed it (see Section 4). The latter three experienced a dramatic shift towards autocratization with the 2024 elections.

Among the 19 **electoral autocracies** holding elections, 15 remained unchanged, there were no positive outcomes, and four countries had negative outcomes – **Bangladesh**, **Mozambique**, **Russia**, and **Togo**. **Bangladesh** and **Togo** were stable regimes in 2023 but the election year 2024 turned them into autocratizers. **Mozambique** and **Russia** were already showing some worrying signs of deterioration in 2023 and became (watchlist) autocratizers in 2024.

The group of six **closed autocracies** exhibits mostly stability. There was only one positive change – **Chad** – where the return of elections and a civilian-led government led to the end of autocratization.

Violence, Media, and Polarization Worsening the Most

Political violence, increasing attacks on media, and deepening polarization are the components of democracy that suffered the most during elections in 2024.

Almost a quarter of all elections held in 2024 – 14 out of 61 – were marred by increasing **political violence**. For example, Mexico held its bloodiest election in recent history, with at least 37 contestants assassinated,[4] and there were assassination attempts on the Prime Minister in Slovakia[5] and on then-candidate Trump alongside other violence in the USA.[6]

At the same time, **mobilization for democracy** decreased substantially and significantly around the election in ten countries, and most of them are autocratic countries, like Belarus, Iran, and Russia. In Russia, for example, President Vladimir Putin won the 2024 election amid rising domestic repression and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Five of the top 10 indicators in Figure 21 show that the 2024 elections were increasingly tilted in favor of the incumbent. Three indicators for **media freedom** and one for **civil society** worsened substantially around elections in nine to ten countries. In Georgia, for example, the OSCE mission found a clear political bias in the media and a disregard for the legal requirement of impartial coverage.[7]

Political polarization increased significantly in nine countries around the 2024 elections. Disinformation and political polarization tend go together with autocratization and mutually reinforce each other (see Box 8), such as in the USA where toxic levels of polarization largely defined debates during the 2024 elections.

Elections also ended up significantly less **free and fair** in nine countries. In Mozambique, for example, there was vote-rigging across the country.[8] In Pakistan the main opposition leader Imran Kahan was sentenced to jail and the military took charge of the electoral process.[9]

1 The analysis and all estimates in this section are presented only for countries that are included in the V-Dem dataset. For 2024, there are 179 countries in the V-Dem dataset. The estimates also do not include subnational elections.
2 In this Section, we are talking mainly about elections' outcomes in terms of countries' trajectories for democracy, as measured by the ERT methodology based on the V-Dem data, v15. We are also reporting only about the outcomes that are already visible in the V-Dem data.
3 "Watchlist" countries are very close to be categorized as democratizers or autocratizers. We explain this in Section 6.
4 www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexican-candidate-assassinations-hit-grim-record-ahead-sundays-election-2024-06-01/, www.nytimes.com/2024/05/25/world/americas/mexico-election-candidates-killed.html
5 www.politico.eu/article/slovak-pm-blames-assassination-attempt-on-opposition-in-first-appearance-since-shooting/
6 www.reuters.com/world/us/new-cases-political-violence-roil-us-ahead-contentious-election-2024-10-21/, www.apnews.com/hub/attempted-assassination-of-donald-trump
7 www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/6/584029_0.pdf
8 www.reuters.com/world/africa/mozambique-ruling-partys-candidate-wins-presidential-election-results-show-2024-10-24/
9 www.cfr.org/blog/pakistans-election-not-free-or-fair-beforehand-chaotic-election-day

TABLE 10. TRAJECTORIES OF COUNTRIES HOLDING ELECTIONS IN 2024

Changes in trajectories for countries holding elections in 2024 are marked as positive if a country is identified as a new democratizer or halted autocratization in 2024; negative if identified as a new autocratizer. Watchlist cases are considered genuine but near miss cases are not. For consistency with Democracy Report 2024, we report 2023 RoW categories and ERT trajectories using V-Dem dataset v14. Note that some countries have changed their regime type in 2024. See Table 1.

REGIME TYPE 2023	COUNTRY	EPISODE 2023	EPISODE 2024	+/−
Liberal Democracy	Czechia	"Near miss" democratization	Democratizer Watchlist	Positive
	Belgium	Stable	Stable	
	Finland			
	France			
	Ireland			
	Japan			
	Taiwan			
	United Kingdom			
	USA			
	Bhutan	"Near miss" autocratization		
	Iceland			
	Uruguay		"Near miss" autocratization	
	South Korea	Autocratization	Autocratization	
Electoral Democracy	Dominican Republic	Democratization	Democratization	
	Maldives			
	Solomon Islands			
	North Macedonia			
	Bulgaria	"Near miss" democratization	Stable	
	Austria	Stable		
	Lithuania			
	Panama			
	Slovakia		Autocratizer Watchlist	Negative
	Sri Lanka	"Near miss" autocratization	Democratization	Positive
	South Africa		Stable	
	Portugal		"Near miss" autocratization	
	Namibia			
	Moldova		Autocratization	Negative
	Georgia			Negative
	Botswana	Autocratization	Stable	Positive
	Croatia		"Near miss" autocratization	
	Ghana			
	Mexico		Autocratization	
	Indonesia			
	Mongolia			
	Romania			
	Senegal			
Electoral Autocracy	Tunisia	Democratization	Democratization	
	Algeria	"Near miss" autocratization	"Near miss" autocratization	
	Mozambique		Autocratization	Negative
	Russia		Autocratizer Watchlist	Negative
	Togo	Stable		Negative
	Madagascar		"Near miss" autocratization	
	Azerbaijan		Stable	
	Rwanda			
	Somaliland			
	Venezuela			
	Bangladesh		Autocratization	Negative
	Cambodia	Autocratization	Stable	
	El Salvador		Autocratization	
	Mauritania			
	Mauritius			
	Pakistan			
	Comoros			
	India			
	Belarus			
Closed Autocracy	Chad	Autocratization	"Near miss" democratization	Positive
	Kuwait	Stable	Stable	
	Uzbekistan			
	Iran			
	Jordan			
	Syria			

FIGURE 21. TOP 10 VARIABLES WORSENING IN 2024 ELECTIONS

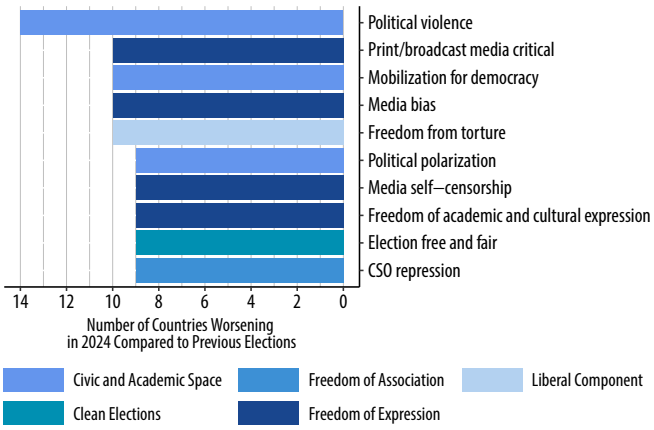


Figure 21 shows the top 10 indicators that worsened the most in the largest number of the 61 countries holding elections in 2024. For each country, 2024 is compared to the year when a country had its previous election.

Mobilization for Democracy On the Rise

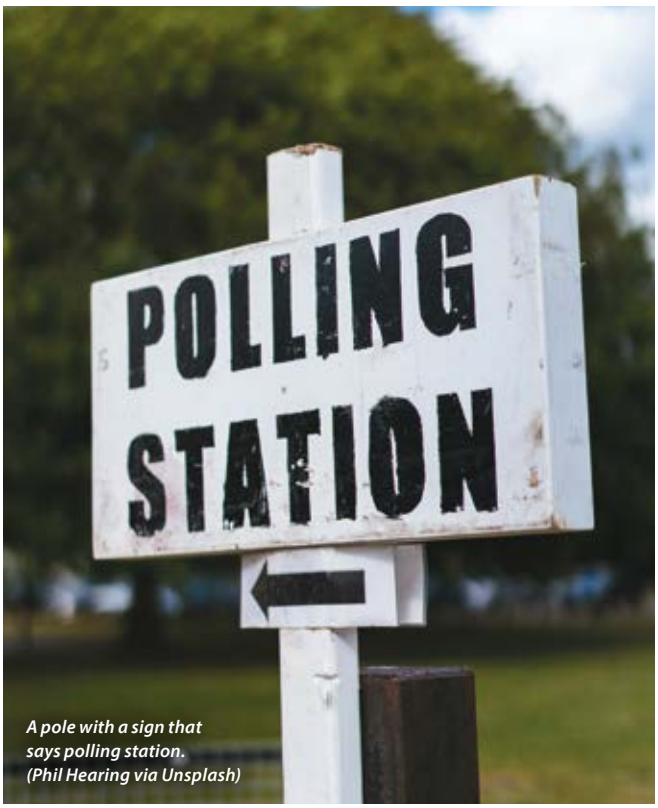
Among indicators that improved in the largest number of countries holding elections in 2024, it is notable that **mobilization for democracy** increased in eleven countries (Figure 22), signaling societal resistance to autocratization pressures. In Botswana[10] and Sri Lanka[11], for example, mass mobilization against the incumbent has helped to halt the declining trend while mobilization failed in Georgia[12] and Venezuela.[13] Decreasing **mobilization for autocracy** in six countries may seem positive, but these are six countries that are autocracies, such as El Salvador and Iran. So it seems rather a sign of increasing autocratic dominance.

Notable is also the decrease in **political polarization** in six countries holding elections in 2024. In Botswana, for example, it went from low[14] to decreasing even further, marking the end of its autocratization episode. Three indicators show that a few countries improved on **election voting irregularities**, **free and fairness**, and **election vote buying**. These countries are on positive trajectories on democracy, such as Dominican Republic, The Maldives, and Solomon Islands.

SOME NOTABLE ELECTIONS

The landslide victory of the alliance of opposition parties – the Alliance for Change headed by Navin Ramgoolam – secured 61% of the votes in **Mauritius**. It is one of the most remarkable outcomes of the 2024 election cycle. The autocratization of Mauritius started in 2019, when the Militant Socialist Movement (MSM) won an absolute majority of seats. Five years later, the MSM did not make it into the Mauritian parliament. Electoral irregularities dropped substantially, elections in 2024 were freer and fairer, and the country improved strongly in the quality of electoral registry.

Botswana registered great improvements in electoral processes becoming freer and fairer, irregularities dropping alongside with government intimidation and elections brought the first ever alternation in power after more than 55 years of democracy.



A pole with a sign that says polling station. (Phil Hearing via Unsplash)

In **Georgia**, electoral irregularities and Russian meddling in the electoral process brought the European Parliament to not recognize the electoral outcome.[15] **Moldova**'s electoral irregularities were condemned by the European Parliament. It issued a strong warning against Russian continued attempts to undermine Moldova's independence.[16] In **Romania**, electoral irregularities involving Russian meddling were so evident that the Romanian Constitutional Court annulled the outcome of the presidential first round.[17]

FIGURE 22. TOP 10 VARIABLES IMPROVING IN 2024 ELECTIONS

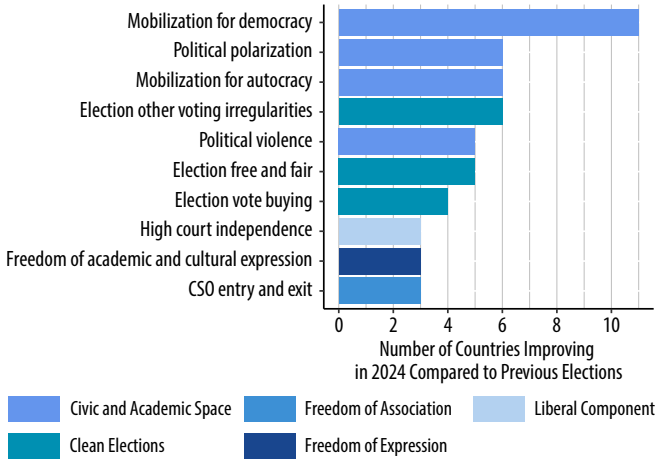


Figure 22 shows the top 10 indicators that improved the most in the largest number of the 61 countries holding elections in 2024. For each country, 2024 is compared to the year when a country had its previous election.

10 www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2024-11/botswana-elections-diamonds-economy.html
11 www.asiasociety.org/policy-institute/sri-lankas-political-shift-dissanayakes-2024-victory-marks-new-era
12 www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/why-georgias-pro-democracy-protests-failed/
13 www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/04/venezuela-brutal-crackdown-protesters-voters
14 www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/BWA
15 www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20241003IPR24421/parliament-condemns-russia-s-interference-in-moldova
16 ibid
17 www.ifes.org/publications/romanian-2024-election-annulment-addressing-emerging-threats-electoral-integrity

6 | Democracy Report 2025 Watchlist

- **There are 20 "near misses" of autocratization and 9 "near misses" of democratization, as of 2024.**
- **7 countries enter the *Democracy Report* "Watchlist" as potential autocratizers – very close to qualify as manifest autocratizers.**
- **3 countries are on the *Democracy Report* "Watchlist" as potential democratizers.**

This year's *Democracy Report* launches a **"Watchlist"** initiative. Countries that the international community could decide to pay special attention to as they exhibit early warning signs of becoming autocratizers or democratizers. Such countries are marked with dark red and dark blue shaded areas in Figure 23. Their potential episode start year and total magnitude of change by 2024 are presented in tables 11 and 12.

The seven countries that are very close to becoming autocratizers that we put on the *Democracy Report 2025* "Watchlist" are: **Cyprus**, **Madagascar**, **Namibia**, **Russia**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, and **Togo**.

Three countries that are bordering to becoming democratizers are: **Czechia**, **Guatemala**, and **Malaysia**.

Most sections of the *Democracy Report* focus on countries in change with manifest substantial changes according to the ERT methodology (see Box 4). The ERT deliberately excludes smaller changes because they could stem from noise in the data. This forces us to be very cautious with declaring that a country has entered a period of change. Yet, as smaller changes accumulate into a large aggregate change, uncertainty reduces.

Since last year, we label as **"near misses"** countries that are at least *halfway* towards becoming autocratizers or democratizers (changes are between 0.05 and 0.1 on the EDI scale from 0 to 1). Figure 23 visualizes such cases, distinguishing between "near miss" autocratizers (red shaded area) and "near miss" democratizers (blue shaded area). There are 20 "near misses" of autocratization and nine "near misses" of democratization.

Yet, even among "near miss" cases, it is uncertain how many will lead to manifest autocratization or democratization. Ambiguity reduces the closer to the threshold cases are, naturally. Countries that are above a higher threshold (0.075 on the EDI) have gone at least *three-quarters* of the way, and we label such cases **"Watchlist"** countries.

Autocratizers Watchlist

Seven countries join the *Democracy Report 2025* Watchlist as potential autocratizers and their potential episode start year and total magnitude of change by 2024 are presented in Table 11.

FIGURE 23. POTENTIAL AUTOCRATIZERS AND DEMOCRATIZERS, 2024

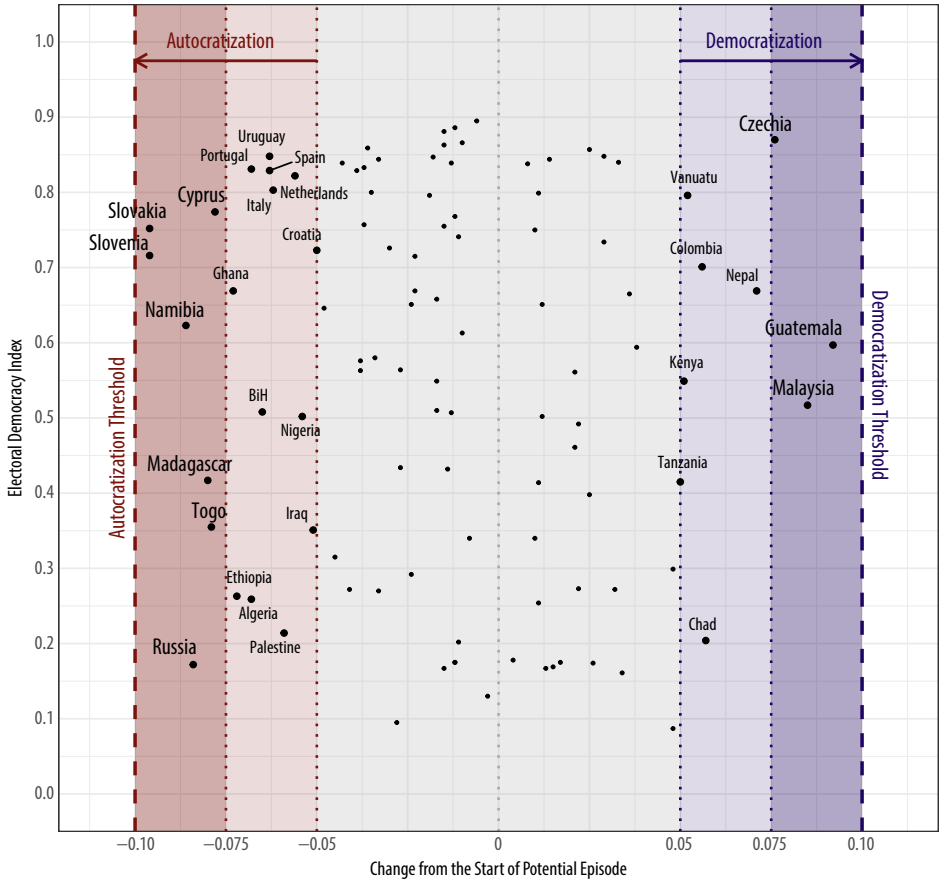


Figure 23 plots countries that are identified as potential autocratizers (red) or potential democratizers (blue), as of 2024. Light red and light blue areas mark all "near miss" cases, whereas dark red and dark blue areas mark countries that enter the Democracy Report "Watchlist". "Near-misses" are identified by using the standard ERT methodology but with a lower threshold (i.e., 0.05 instead of 0.1 on the EDI), while "Watchlist" is reserved for countries that are above 0.075 threshold. Changes below 0.05 on the EDI (grey area) are treated as noise in data.

TABLE 11. MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE, FIGURE 23

1	Slovenia	2022	-0.096
2	Slovakia	2022	-0.092
3	Namibia	2017	-0.086
4	Russia	2020	-0.084
5	Madagascar	2022	-0.080
6	Togo	2020	-0.079
7	Cyprus	2016	-0.078

Potential autocratizers are ranked according to their magnitude of decline by 2024. -0.1 is a threshold for autocratization.

Slovenia was recently in an episode of autocratization (2015–2021), but quickly recovered from it by the end of 2022, when left-liberal coalition took over power.[1] Yet, the new government now started to take an autocratic turn by seeking to undermine the media and the opposition that brought protesters to the streets. The deteriorations of 2023–2024 bring Slovenia's level of democracy back to the 2021-level and as close as Slovakia to turn into a manifest autocratization episode.

Slovakia has been showing a very rapid decline on the democracy index during the last two years. It reflects Prime Minister Fico's attempts to consolidate power by undermining judicial independence, attacking civil society organization, and exerting political control over the media.[2] Slovakia is deeply polarized[3] and remains only a thin margin away from the autocratization threshold.

In **Namibia**, the decline on the democracy index is largely driven by the attacks on freedom of expression and the media by ex-President Hage Geingob and his Minister of Information and Communication Technology, Tjekero Tweya.[4] President Geingob died last year, and the 2024 election brought the country's first female president to power.

Russia's decline of the last years is due to war-time restrictions imposed by President Vladimir Putin, banning all remaining independent media, dismantling critical civil society organizations, and censoring more than 247,000 websites.[5] In 2022 alone, the State Duma passed a record 653 laws criminalizing speech around the war in Ukraine.[6]

In **Madagascar**, some worrying developments include President Andry Rajoelina's tight grip over the media and security apparatus, as well as attacks on the opposition and dissidents.[7] The 2023 elections were boycotted by the opposition,[8] and Rajoelina was re-elected for a third term. In 2024, the ruling party initially lost its parliamentary majority but regained it in the new legislature after appeal to the High Constitutional Court.[9]

In **Togo**, some first worrying signs of deteriorations can be traced back to 2020, when President Faure Gnassingbé amended the constitution to extend his stay in office until 2030.[10] A larger drop came in 2024 when President Gnassingbé and his ruling party unanimously changed the constitution to eliminate direct universal suffrage for presidency.[11] The 2024 election extended President Gnassingbé's 20-year-old rule.

Cyprus has been in a very slow but steady process of democratic erosion for nearly a decade already. Between 2018–2023, the country has experienced declines on measures for judicial accountability, freedom of expression and the media, and access to justice.[12] In 2023, the country lost its status of liberal democracy and remains an electoral democracy by the end of 2024.

Democratizers Watchlist

Three countries are on our watchlist of potential democratizers: **Czechia**, **Guatemala**, and **Malaysia**.

TABLE 12. MAGNITUDE OF CHANGE, FIGURE 23

Rank	Watchlist Democratizers	"Potential Start Year"	Change on EDI
1	Guatemala	2023	0.092
2	Malaysia	2021	0.085
3	Czechia	2021	0.076

Potential democratizers are ranked according to their magnitude of improvement by 2024. 0.1 is a threshold for democratization.

Guatemala is the closest one to qualify as a democratizer after featuring as an autocratizer only one year ago in the *Democracy Report 2024*. The 2023 election marked a notable turning point. The opposition candidate Bernardo Arévalo – supported by a broad coalition of civil society, indigenous groups, international community, and the leading business associations – defeated the ruling elites at the ballot.[13] As of 2024, Guatemala is only a small margin away from becoming a U-turn.

Malaysia started a transformation from dominant-party rule in 2018, when the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition of opposition parties led by Anwar Ibrahim defeated the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) that ruled Malaysia for 60 years – since its independence in 1957. The historical win by the PH paved the way for a political crisis between 2020–2022.[14] In 2022, PH secured a weak majority that forced it into a broader coalition government, while UMNO suffered its worst defeat yet.[15] These slow but progressive political liberalization brought to Malaysia some notable advances in judicial independence[16] and freedom of expression,[17] moving it close to qualify as a democratizer.

Czechia had a period of deteriorations on democracy level in 2017–2021 and was featured as one of autocratizing countries in *Democracy Report 2022*.[18] Since 2021, there has been significant improvements in access to justice, effective parliament and freedom of expression.[19] By 2024, Czechia has fully restored the deteriorations of the previous years and has further increased its democracy level. It is now close to be a democratizer.

1 www.freedomhouse.org/country/slovenia
2 www.freedomhouse.org/article/assassination-attempt-threatens-slovakias-democracy
3 www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/ficos-assassination-attempt-reveals-slovakias-serious-tensions-polarisation/
4 www.democratic-erosion.org/2017/11/28/media-attack-in-namibia-a-symbol-of-democratic-erosion-by-ebenezer-akomolafe-university-of-memphis/
5 www.roskomsvoboda.org/en/post/o-blokirovkah/
6 www.novayagazeta.eu/articles/2023/01/04/come-to-your-senses
7 www.democratic-erosion.com/2024/01/04/the-overlooked-backsliding-of-malagasy-democracy/
8 www.freedomhouse.org/country/madagascar/freedom-world/2024
9 www.idea.int/democracytracker/country/madagascar
10 www.freedomhouse.org/country/togo/freedom-world/2020
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18 Note that we were using different methodology for identifying autocratizing / democratizing countries until 2024. According to the ERT methodology, Czechia was not an autocratizer during that period (declines on the EDI were not substantial enough). Yet, it experienced a period of substantial deteriorations on the LDI.
19 www.idea.int/democracytracker/country/czechia

BOX 9. USA – A DEMOCRATIC BREAKDOWN IN THE MAKING?

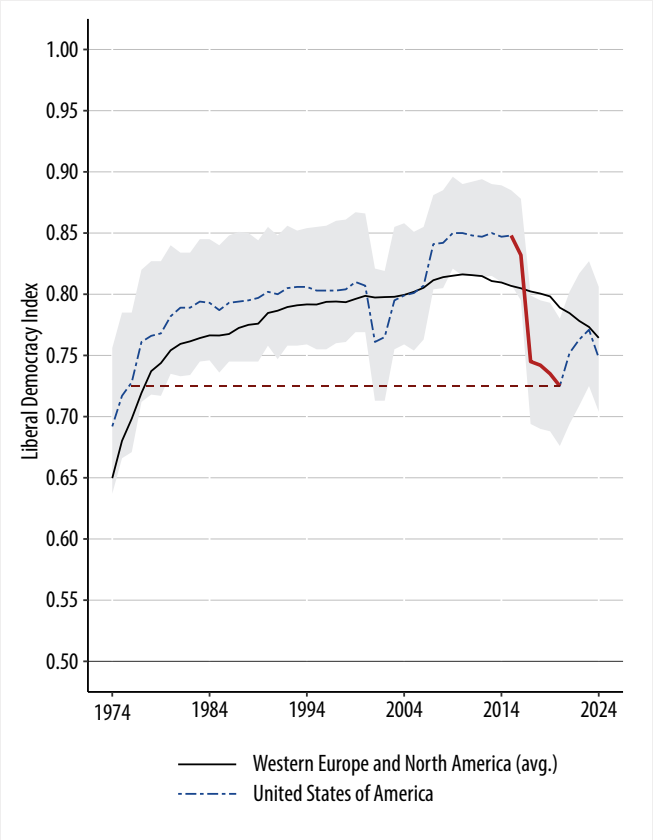
The scale of what is happening in the US is unprecedented and prompts a closer look at what seems to be the fastest evolving episode of autocratization the USA has been through in modern history. Unfortunately, the just released V-Dem data only cover events until 31 December 2024, so we must rely on other sources.

Processes of autocratization during the last 25 years have typically evolved gradually with democratically elected leaders dismantling constraints on executive power by "executive aggrandizement,"[1] and each step becoming the "new normal". President Trump operates openly and acts rapidly to the extent that even cautious analysts like Professor Steven Levitsky say the regime is now some type of authoritarianism.[2] How close is it to a regime breakdown in the making?

USA DEMOCRACY AND TRUMP 1.0

Democracy took a beating during President Trump's first time in office. The LDI fell from 0.85 to 0.73 in those four years, bringing the country back to its 1976 level – far below the regional average (Figure 1). After losing the 2020 election, Trump tried to strongarm election officials to "find" him extra votes, coerce Vice President Pence to alter the results, and watched quietly as insurgents raided Congress. President Biden was installed and American democracy survived, but did not recover fully (Figure 1). It is now *weaker* than when Trump took office in 2017 and is being attacked a lot *more* than before.

FIGURE 1. THE USA VS. REGIONAL AVERAGE, 1974–2024



TRUMP 2.0: A (QUASI) TOTAL ATTACK ON THE INSTITUTIONS

Trump's second administration is proving to be different than his first. Trump ran an openly authoritarian campaign[3] in 2024, pledging to prosecute his rivals, punish critical media, and deploy the army to repress protests.

As of the time of writing, Trump has been in office for six weeks. The speed with which American democracy is coming under strain has taken many observers by surprise. The expansion of executive power, undermining of Congress' power of the purse, offensives on independent and counter-veiling institutions and the media, as well as purging and dismantling of state institutions – classic strategies of autocratizers – seem to be in action. The enabling silence among critics fearful of retributions,[4] is already prevalent.

Attacks on the rule of law

The judiciary is a key institution that autocratizers attack during autocratization,[5] especially in the early phase.[6] A regime transition necessarily requires that rule of law is bent in favor of an aspiring autocrat.

During his first day in office, President Trump pardoned[7] 1,500 criminals convicted for the January 6 Capitol Hill assault. This was one of the first steps in efforts to undermine legitimacy of courts and the rule of law. By excusing and even celebrating past illegal attacks, President Trump has also given a tacit but clear endorsement of future violence,[8] according to experts.

On 6 March, President Trump issued the first executive order[9] directly targeting the law firm representing former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in a move that can be interpreted as weaponizing the state.

President Trump has refused to follow court orders,[10] and claimed that "He who saves his country does not violate any law."[11] This statement seems to reflect in the actions of the administration. There are already over 70 lawsuits filed against President Trump and his administration for breaking the law and the Constitution.[12]

These efforts by the Trump administration to undermine the judicial constraints on executive power recently prompted the American Bar Association to issue a statement on the need to protect the rule of law.[13] The ABA identifies the administration's actions as being especially problematic because they *"knowingly undermine the division of powers between the executive and congressional branches set out within the US Constitution."*[14]

Abolition of accountability institutions

Horizontal accountability – checks and balances – is at the core of republican thinking and liberal democracy.[15] Institutions providing effective checks and balances are therefore typically among the first targets during autocratization.[16] Serious weakening of accountability is one of the early indications of regime

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2 www.nytimes.com/2025/03/06/us/politics/trump-democracy.html
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transition. Replacing civil servants with personal loyalists and allies is one known tactic to achieve this.[17]

That line runs through actions taken so far[18] by the Trump administration purging[19] the highest levels of the Department of Defense, the Justice Department, the Department of Homeland Security, Department of State, USAID, and the FBI of those not personally loyal to him. Purges also have signaling effects, discouraging civil servants from questioning actions of the president in the future.

Trump also fired independent Inspector Generals across 17 agencies[20] and is seeking to replace them with loyalists.[21] Similarly, he fired the head of the Office of Special Counsel,[22] who is responsible for protecting whistleblowers. In the following court case, the Justice Department filed an appeal arguing that the court must not encroach on the President's executive authority – one of many actions seeking to expand executive power.[23]

The perhaps most serious challenge comes from violations of Congress' power of the purse enshrined in the Constitution,[24] and the 1974 Impoundment Control Act. These are now discussed as a constitutional crisis in the making.[25] The list of legal cases involving claims to unconstrained power made by the administration is long and revealing of efforts to do away with liberal democracy's foundation of principles of checks and balances.[26]

Purges in the military

During executive-led autocratization, securing passive bystanding by the military is often instrumental.[27] Purging the top-ranks in the military and replacing based on allegiances is a tactic often used.

Trump has started purging the military by removing the nation's highest-ranking military officer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as the Chief of Naval Operations, Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force. Replacements have pledged personal loyalty to Trump.[28]

Firing the military's top judge advocates general – who have the independent legal authority to tell that an order from the president or the secretary of defense is unlawful and should not be obeyed, provides another worrying sign of seeking to make the military a subservient bystander.[29]

Attacks on freedom of the media

Suppression of media freedom is the most common weapon of choice among autocratizing leaders over the past 25 years (see Section 3), using tactics from threats and lawsuits, to worse.

Trump started intimidating the media already during his campaign when he repeatedly threatened to strip broadcasting licenses from stations.[30] In the same vein, Trump is threatening to sue publishers and media who use anonymous sources,[31] which would be a big blow to freedom of expression and the media. The effect already materialized with Washington Post (WP) owner Jeff Bezos stopping the WP from endorsing Kamala Harris,[32] and then announcing a "refocusing" WP's editorial stance in a deferral to Trump.

The White House is now claiming[33] it has the right to pick which media and reporters are allowed to cover the President,[34] ripping it away from the White House Correspondents' Association. It so far denied access to HuffPost and the Associated Press reminiscent of the autocratization tactic to stir the rhetoric in favor of the President and retaliate against media who diverge from his views. Such moves towards autocratization also suggests a possible regime transition.

DOGE

A special case of eschewing accountability and dismantling state institutions is the creation of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)[35] led by billionaire Elon Musk. Notwithstanding its name, it is not a government department and appears to be accountable only to Trump.[36]

Despite his conflicts of interest, Musk has access to sensitive, private, and classified information. In at least 11 lawsuits,[37] plaintiffs argue that DOGE has flouted laws and rules around data and privacy. Due to its opacity, it is not possible to know how far DOGE has gone, but it has already fired tens of thousands of government employees. Among them are United States Agency for International Development (USAID) officers, effectively closing an agency instituted by a Congressional act. That will have grave and enduring consequences not only for the US, but also for democracy globally since USAID was by far the largest actor in the international democracy support community.

Upending the USAID may be the plainest affront on republican-liberal principles of horizontal accountability and the powers of Congress yet. It may also become the first area where the Trump administration's willingness to abide by court rulings and be bound by rule of law, will be put to the ultimate test. With a razor-thin majority, the Supreme Court on 5 March ruled against the administration and in favor of Congress' right to have its appropriations carried out. This may be the litmus test for American democracy.

Given the ongoing assaults, is the USA heading towards democratic breakdown, or not?

American flag behind barbed wire. (Pixabay via Pexels)

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Aerial view of a pedestrian bridge that reads "Democracy" in downtown Sao Paulo, Brazil. (Nelson Almeida/AFP via Getty Images)

V-Dem Methodology: Aggregating Expert Assessments

Author: Kyle L. Marquardt

V-DEM USES INNOVATIVE METHODS TO aggregate expert judgments and thereby produce estimates of important concepts. We use expert judgement because many key features of democracy are not directly observable. For example, it is easy to observe whether or not a legislature has the legal right to investigate an executive. However, assessing the extent to which the legislature actually does so requires extensive conceptual and case knowledge.

V-Dem typically gathers data from five experts per country-year observation, using a pool of over 4,200 country experts who provide judgment on different concepts and cases. Experts hail from almost every country in the world, allowing us to leverage diverse opinions.

Despite their clear value, expert-coded data pose multiple problems. Rating concepts requires judgment, which varies across experts and cases; it may also vary systematically across groups of experts. We address these concerns by aggregating expert-coded data with a measurement model, allowing us to account for uncertainty and potential biases.

The logic of the V-Dem measurement model is that unobserved concepts exist (e.g. a certain level of academic freedom and freedom of cultural expression) but we only see imperfect manifestations of these concepts. That is, experts report their judgments about these concepts as applied to specific cases using rough ordinal categories. Our model then converts these expert ratings to a single continuous latent scale and thereby estimates values of the concept.

In the process, the model algorithmically estimates both the degree to which an expert is reliable relative to other experts, as well as the degree to which their perception of the response scale differs from other experts. Similarly, we use patterns of overlapping coding – both from experts who code multiple countries and experts who code hypothetical cases – to estimate the degree to which differences in scale perception are systematic across experts who code different sets of cases. Given the iterative nature of the estimation process, these estimates of reliability and scale perception weight an expert's contribution to the estimation of the unobserved concept.

In the resulting V-Dem dataset, we present users with a best estimate of the value for an observation (the point estimate), as well as an uncertainty estimate (credible regions, a Bayesian corollary of confidence intervals). More precisely, the output of the measurement model is an interval-level point estimate of the latent trait that typically ranges in value from –5 to 5, and its associated measurement error. These estimates are the best version of the data to use in statistical analysis.

However, the interval-level estimates are difficult for some users to interpret substantively. We therefore also provide interval-level point estimates that we have linearly transformed back to the coding scale that experts originally used to code each case. These estimates typically run from 0 to 4 (the modal scale range); users can refer to the V-Dem codebook to substantively interpret them.

Finally, we provide ordinal versions of each variable for applications in which users require ordered categorical values. Each of the latter two data versions are also accompanied by credible regions.

VERSIONS OF THE V-DEM INDICATORS

Suffix	Scale	Description	Recommended use
None	Interval	V-Dem measurement model estimates	Regression analysis
_osp	Interval	Linearized transformation of the model estimates on the original scale	Substantive interpretation of graphs and data
_ord	Ordinal	Most likely ordinal value of model estimates on the original scale	Substantive interpretation of graphs and data
_codelow / _codehigh	Interval	One standard deviation above (*_codehigh*) and below (*_codelow*) a point estimate	Evaluating differences across units and over time within units
_sd	Interval	Standard deviation of the interval estimate	Creating confidence intervals based on user needs

The final V-Dem dataset thus includes a set of versions of indicators of democratic institutions and concepts, which allow academics and policymakers alike to understand the different features of a polity. The text box summarizes the output with which we provide users.

Key Terms

Point Estimate: A best estimate of a concept's value.

Confidence Intervals: Credible regions for which the upper and lower bounds represent a range of probable values for a point estimate. These bounds are based on the interval in which the measurement model places 6w8 percent of the probability mass for each score, which is generally approximately equivalent to the upper and lower bounds of one standard deviation from the median.

Significant Differences or Changes: When the upper and lower bounds of the confidence intervals for two point estimates do not overlap, we are confident that the difference between them is not a result of measurement error.

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V-Dem Co-Principal Investigators: Commentary on the Democracy Report

Authors: Michael Coppedge, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Jan Teorell

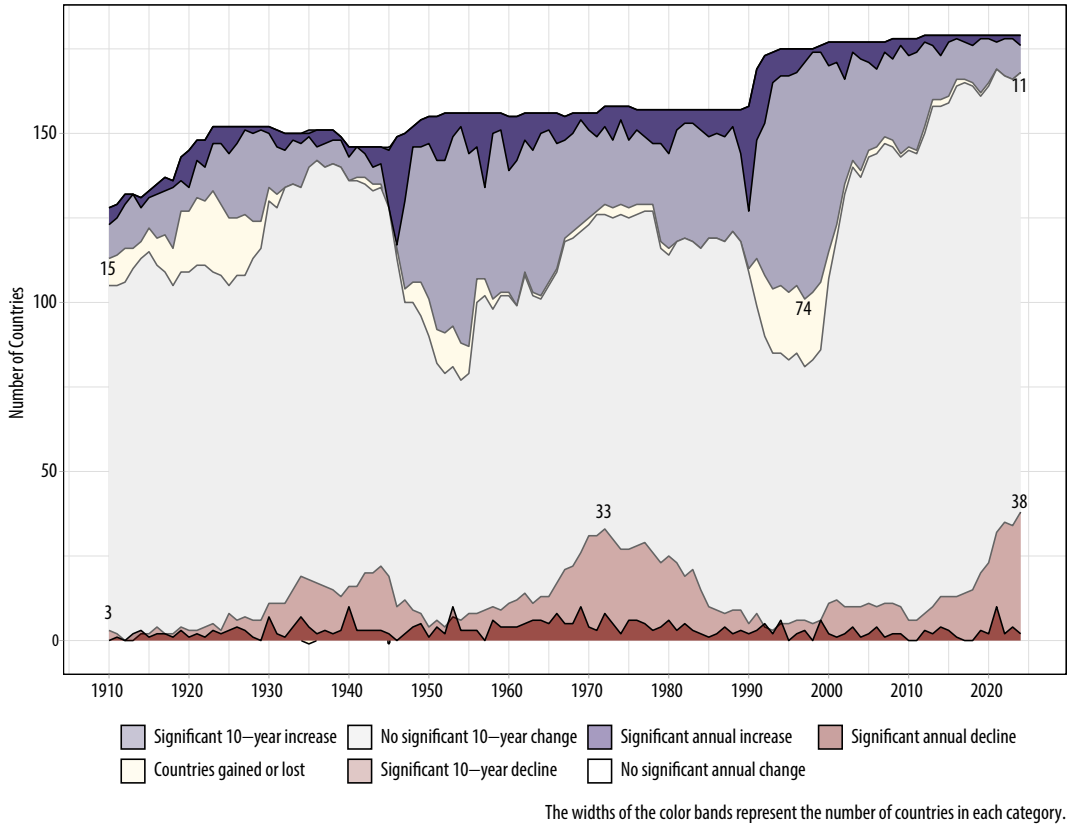
Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) involves democracy researchers working at institutions around the world. The V-Dem dataset is the main output. Since 2017, the V-Dem Institute in Gothenburg has also published an annual Democracy Report (DR). This is a commentary on that report, written by four of V-Dem's five PIs.

As we noted last year in a similar commentary, we stand behind much of the DR's analysis. However, we do question some choices. Last year, we elaborated on three elements of the DR that we find problematic: (a) interpretations of trends based on population-weighted measures, (b) insufficient attention to measurement uncertainty, and (c) use of crisp categories. Since these elements remain in this year's DR, we repeat our critiques briefly. We then dig deeper into how crisp categorization choices influence conclusions about democratic decline, focusing on the category "liberal democracy".

First, global data in the DR are often weighted by population. Such weighting may be appropriate for describing trends in the experiences of the "average global person." But it could give misleading impressions if used to describe or interpret global trends. The reason is that developments in a few large countries heavily influence population-weighted trends. In particular, democratic decline in India, with 18 percent of global population in 2014, drove almost all of the drop in electoral democracy from 38 percent of the population to less than 20 percent after 2013 (see Figure 5 of this year's report). The most dramatic negative global trend in the DR is thus largely a reflection of democratic decline in one very populous country rather than a decline in many countries.

Second, all measurement, including V-Dem's expert-based and other measures, is subject to error. One key benefit of V-Dem is that many measures come with uncertainty estimates, enabling users to account for measurement error when presenting and interpreting global trends. Unfortunately, this uncertainty is under-played in the DR. While there have been improvements to recent DRs (see, e.g., Figure 4 and discussions of grey-zone countries in this year's report), many of the figures, summaries, and interpretations are lacking in this regard. In Figure 1, we illustrate one important implication: the DR under-plays the fact that the vast majority of countries have had fairly stable democracy scores. In a few cases, regimes have moved in a democratic direction. While we agree that recent trends toward autocracy are concerning, discussions of democratic decline should acknowledge that these declines have so far affected a minority of countries across the world.

FIGURE 1. NUMBER OF COUNTRIES WITH SIGNIFICANT CHANGES ON ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY INDEX OVER 1 OR 10 YEARS



The widths of the color bands represent the number of countries in each category.
Categories reflect changes over 1 or 10 years that exceeded their country's 95% HPD confidence bounds.

Third, the DR relies heavily on crisp categories. For example, it reports that 91 of 179 countries are "autocracies" and less than 12 percent of the global population lives in "liberal democracies." V-Dem does not have an official categorization of "autocracies" or "liberal democracies." To compose these categories, the DR draws heavily on the Regimes of the World (RoW) typology. RoW combines information from various (continuous) V-Dem measures, imposing inherently arbitrary cut-offs to categorize countries into types.[1] It is difficult to overemphasize this fundamental point: classification of countries into different distinct types presupposes an underlying theoretical notion of qualitative differences between one type and another. We may certainly imagine some such qualitative distinctions as essential. Regimes not even holding elections can, for example, never qualify as democracies. What we are mainly talking about here, however, are countries that all hold elections and that thus only differ among themselves in terms of things such as the degree of certain freedoms enjoyed by their citizens or the degree of the judicial and legislative constraints on the executive. There is nothing qualitative that differs among countries falling just above or just below a certain threshold imposed on these underlying continuous scales. This makes any classification of a country into a "liberal" or simply "electoral democracy" inherently arbitrary.

Let us illustrate how arbitrary classification choices can influence interpretations of both the current state of democracy and recent global trends. Figure 2 depicts trends from 1960 to 2024 following three ways of categorizing "liberal democracy". As noted, there is no consensus approach to this question, and anyone who feels compelled to construct crisp categories encounters multiple choices in measurement and aggregation.

The RoW scheme represents just one approach from an infinite number that might be devised. Another approach is to set thresholds along the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) – which stretches, in principle, from 0 to 1, but where the maximum score observed in 2024 is 0.88 (Denmark). Figure 2 presents two such options, one with a threshold of 0.6 and the other with a more lenient threshold of 0.5. The 0.6-version leaves Poland and Slovenia (in 2024) just above the threshold, and Slovakia and Greece just below. In contrast, the 0.5-version also counts Slovakia and Greece as liberal democracies, whereas Peru and Botswana fall just below this alternative threshold.

All of the approaches embedded in Figure 2 are plausible; yet, each gives a very different impression of the global state of liberal democracy as well as of recent trends. The RoW measure used in the DR stands out by giving a much lower count of the current number of liberal democracies and by displaying a much steeper decline. The number of RoW liberal democracies, globally, in 2012 was 44, dropping to 29 in 2024, a 34 percent reduction. In contrast, the 0.5-threshold measure counted 67 liberal democracies in 2012 and 61 in 2024, a 9 percent decline. The 0.6 threshold falls in between. These counts assume that the classifications are reliable. If one incorporates measurement uncertainty, several countries may not have clearly switched categories.

Leaving aside a more technical discussion of the RoW's rules and operational choices (which we have concerns about), let us simply point out that RoW leads to some rather unorthodox classifications. For example, the countries that lost their status as a liberal democracy between 2012 and 2024 include Austria, Canada, Portugal, and the United Kingdom. These countries are widely regarded as "liberal democracies" according to conventional uses of the term, and they score, respectively, 0.76, 0.74, 0.75, and 0.75 on LDI in 2024. These scores are only a decimal point below top-scoring countries such as Norway (5th-ranked; 0.84) and Sweden (4th-ranked; 0.85) – meaning they are safely classified as liberal democracies on both of our alternative measures, both in 2012 and 2024. Interestingly, RoW categorizes some countries with substantially lower LDI scores as liberal democracies, including South Africa (0.65), Jamaica (0.68), and Italy (.71) in 2024. In 2012, Serbia (0.49) and Bhutan (0.51) were registered as liberal democracies by RoW with much lower LDI scores.

What we should take away from this exercise is not simply to point out the low face validity of several RoW-categorizations, but also the more general point that counts of liberal democracies (or other regime types) based on crisp categories must be taken with a grain of salt. All distinctions are arbitrary, if based on underlying indices that are continuous. Hence, alternate choices in measurement and aggregation may render very different classifications.

FIGURE 2. NUMBER OF "LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES" FROM 2000–2024, FOR THREE DIFFERENT CATEGORIZATIONS.

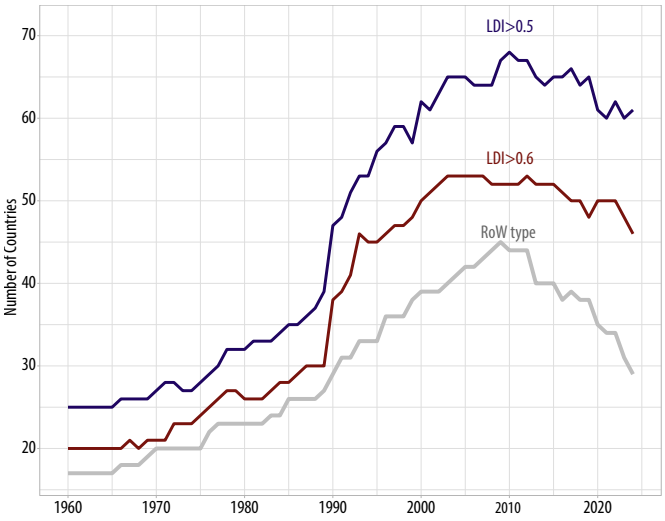


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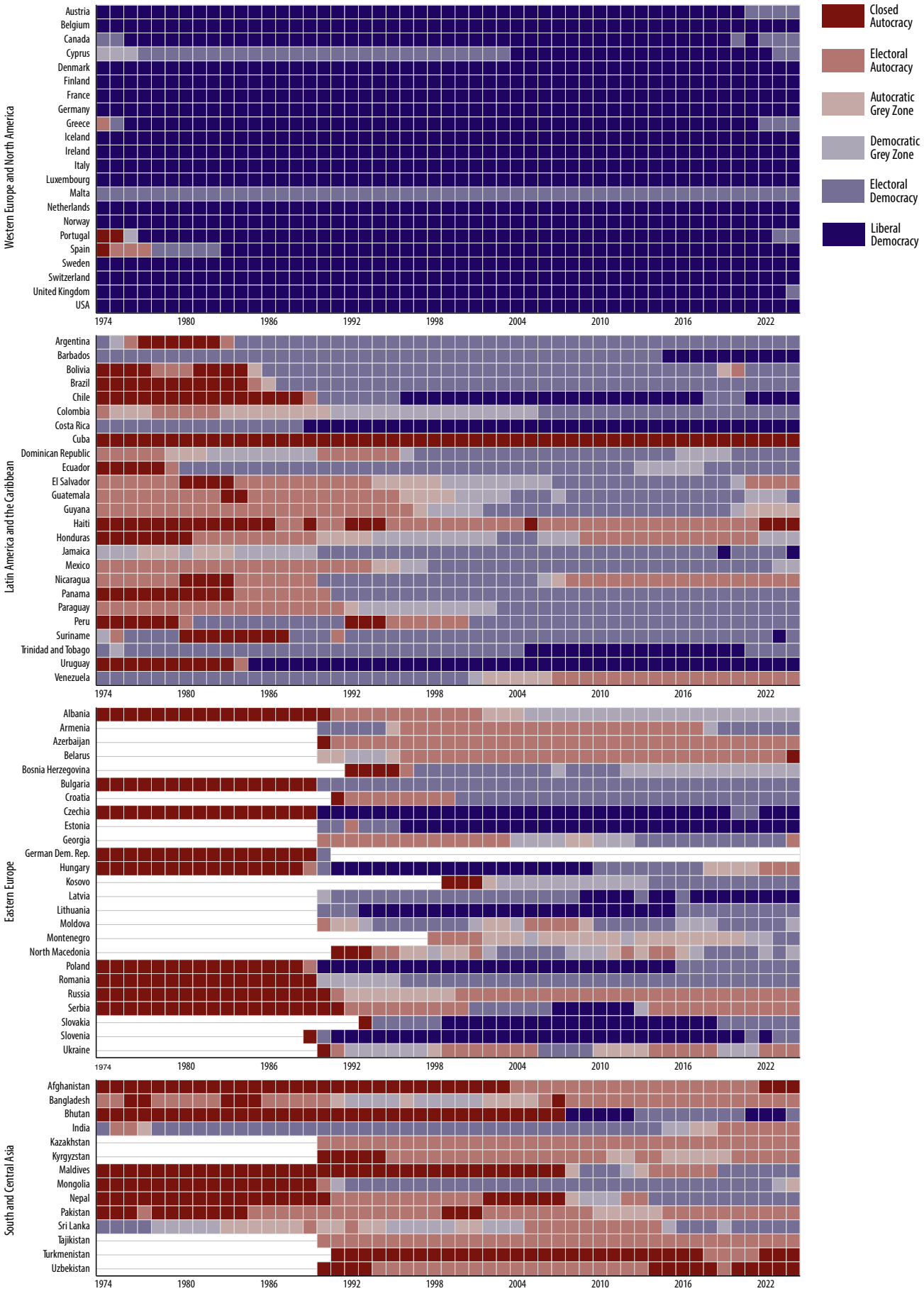
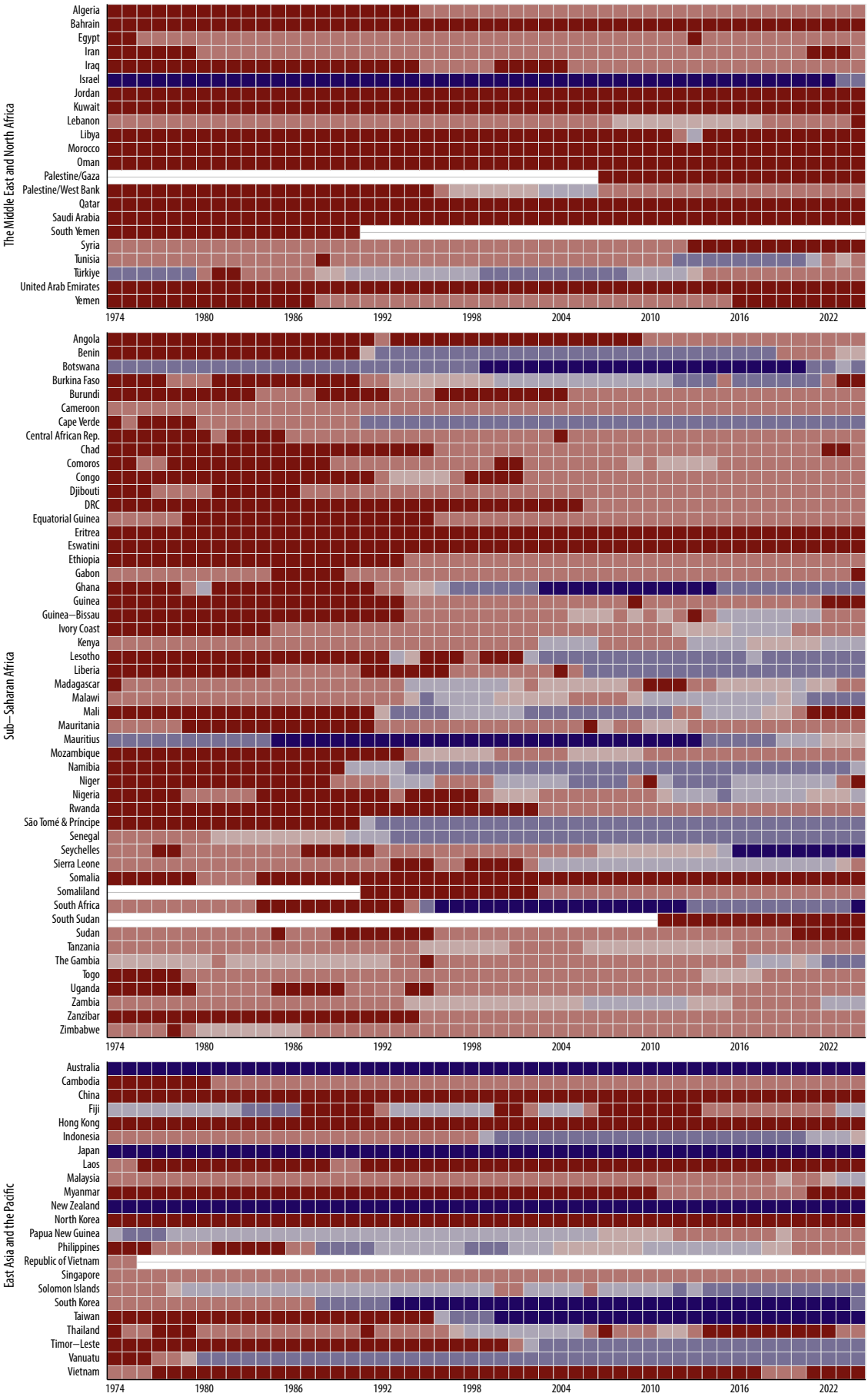
TABLE A1. HISTORY OF REGIMES OF THE WORLD BY COUNTRY-YEAR, 1974–2024

Countries are divided into political regions. Regions with higher density of population living in democracies are placed in higher position. The figure shows the history of Regimes of the World (RoW) in the last 50 years, 1974–2024, for each country. Each tile corresponds to one year and we use the PanelView R package developed by Mou, Liu, and Xu (2022) to visualize the history of RoW. The typology is published in Lührmann et al. 2018. Regimes of the World (RoW), Politics and Governance 6(1).




The Middle East and North Africa
Algeria
Bahrain
Egypt
Iran
Iraq
Israel
Jordan
Kuwait
Lebanon
Libya
Morocco
Oman
Palestine/Gaza
Palestine/West Bank
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
South Yemen
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Central African Rep.
Chad
Comoros
Congo
Djibouti
DRC
Equatorial Guinea
Eritrea
Eswatini
Ethiopia
Gabon
Ghana
Guinea
Guinea−Bissau
Ivory Coast
Kenya
Lesotho
Liberia
Madagascar
Malawi
Mali
Mauritania
Mauritius
Mozambique
Namibia
Niger
Nigeria
Rwanda
São Tomé & Príncipe
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Somalia
Somaliland
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The Gambia
Togo
Uganda
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East Asia and the Pacific
Australia
Cambodia
China
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New Zealand
North Korea
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Philippines
Republic of Vietnam
Singapore
Solomon Islands
South Korea
Taiwan
Thailand
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Vanuatu
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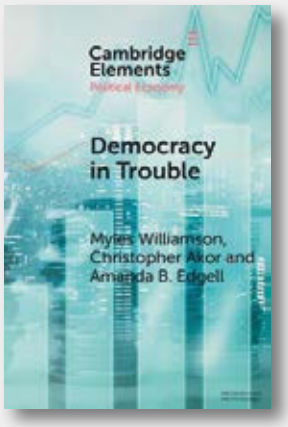
2022

Publications from the V-Dem Team



Democracy in Trouble: Democratic Resilience and Breakdown from 1900 to 2022

Myles Williamson, Christopher Akor and Amanda B. Edgell
2025 | Cambridge University Press

▶ The book investigates nine cases where democratically elected governments engaged in deliberate and gradual dismantling of democratic institutions (executive aggrandizement) that posed a real threat to democracy, comparing the failed cases to the ones that were successful in dismantling democracy. It reveals a similar pattern with leaders often targeting the media, civil society, and judiciary, and using shared tactics to weaken democratic institutions.

The comparison shows that democratic resilience may often happen by mistake – where democracies survived, antidemocratic incumbents made critical errors, including major policy blunders and miscalculations, which ultimately cost them their positions and allowed democracy to rebound. Where democracy broke down, incumbents were largely able to avoid or mitigate such errors, often through ethnopopulist appeals, using divisive populist rhetoric to scapegoat and avoid blame for their actions.

Democracy and Dictatorship

Carl Henrik Knutsen
2024 | Fagbokforlaget

▶ What exactly is *democracy*, and how do we measure it? What constitutes a high-quality democracy, and what factors increase the risk of countries moving towards dictatorship? Does democracy matter for economic development, inequality, or education policy?

The book *Democracy and Dictatorship* gives an updated account of the most pressing questions preoccupying democracy researchers. It offers an introduction to the study of democracy and autocracy, discussing subjects such as the conceptualization and measurement of democracy and regime types, the historical development of democracy, and causes of regime stability and change, and more.

Featured Publication

When autocratization is reversed: episodes of U-Turns since 1900
Marina Nord, Fabio Angiolillo, Martin Lundstedt, Felix Wiebrecht, and Staffan I. Lindberg
2025 | Democratization, 1–24.

▶ The article introduces "U-Turn" as a new type of regime transformation episode in which autocratization is closely followed by and linked to subsequent democratization. The data on U-Turn episodes open new avenues for research on autocratization and democratization, particularly it could help us understand why some processes of autocratization trigger a successful pro-democratic backlash. Previous V-Dem Working Paper 147.

Publications 2024

Angiolillo, F., Lundstedt, M., Nord, M., & Lindberg, S. I. (2024). **State of the world 2023: democracy winning and losing at the ballot**. *Democratization: 1–25.*

Fabio Angiolillo. **Authoritarian Ruling Parties' Recruitment Dilemma: Evidence from China**. *Journal of East Asian Studies. 23(3): 491515.*

Boese-Schlosser, V., Eberhardt, M. (2024). **Democracy Doesn't Always Happen Over Night: Regime Change in Stages and Economic Growth**. *The Review of Economics and Statistics. 2024.*

Buckley N., Marquardt K. L., Reuter, O.J., Tertytchnaya, K. (2024). **Endogenous Popularity: How Perceptions of Support Affect the Popularity of Authoritarian Regimes**. *American Political Science Review. 118(2):1046–1052.* (Previous V-Dem Working Paper 132).

Edgell A. B., Lachapelle J., Maerz S. F. **Achieving Transparency, Traceability, and Readability with Human-Coded Data**. *PS: Political Science & Politics. 2024:16.* (Previous V-Dem Working Paper 145).

del Río, A., Knutsen, C. H., & Lutscher, P. M. (2024). **Education Policies and Systems Across Modern History: A Global Dataset**. *Comparative Political Studies. 0(0).* (Previous V-Dem Working Paper 138).

Gervasoni, C. (2024). **Economic dependence on the state and pro-authority attitudes: evidence from 18 Latin-American countries**. *Acta Politica. 59:98–123.*

Kalemaj, I., Lleshi, S. (2024). **Assessing Success Through Party Label Durability: A Comparative Study of the Democratic Party of Albania and the Homeland Union of Lithuania**. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs. 10(1):212–32.*

Kim, W., Bernhard, M. and Hicken, A. (2024). **Party system institutionalization and the durability of competitive authoritarian regimes**. *European Journal of Political Research.* (Previous V-Dem Working Paper 129).

Knutsen, C.H., & Kolvani, P. (2024). **Fighting the Disease or Manipulating the Data? Democracy, State Capacity, and the COVID-19 Pandemic**. *World Politics. 76(3), 543–593.* (Previous V-Dem Working Paper 127).

Knutsen C.H., Marquardt K.L., Seim, B., Coppedge, M., Edgell, A., Medzihorsky, J., Pemstein, D., Teorell, J., Gerring, J., and Lindberg, S.I. (2024). **Conceptual and Measurement Issues in Assessing Democratic Backsliding**. *PS: Political Science & Politics. 1(16).* (Previous V-Dem Working Paper 140).

Knutsen, C.H., Morgenbesser, L., Wig, T. (2024). **On the move: Autocratic leaders, security, and capital relocations**. *Political Geography. 113: 103154.*

Lleshi, S., Kalemaj, I. (2024). **Party Organisation, Youth Wings and Political Representation in Contemporary Albania**. *Europe-Asia Studies. 76(10): 1551–1573.*

Marquardt, K. L., Pemstein, D., Sanhueza Petrarca, C., Seim, B., Wilson, S. L., Bernhard, M., Coppedge, M., & Lindberg, S.I. (2024). **Experts, coders and crowds: An analysis of substitutability**. *International Political Science Review. 0(0).* (Previous V-Dem Working Paper 53)

Mechkova, V., Pemstein, D., Seim, B., & Wilson, S.L. (2024). **Measuring online political activity: introducing the digital society project dataset**. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics:1–17.*

Sato, Y., & Wiebrecht, F. (2024). **Disinformation and Regime Survival**. *Political Research Quarterly. 0(0).* (Previous V-Dem Working Paper 144).

Wiebrecht, F. (2024). **Corruption, Elite Contestation, and Parliaments: Why Do Legislatures Become Stronger in Authoritarian Regimes?** *Political Research Quarterly. 77(1): 255–269.*

Wiesner, K., Bien, S., and Wilson M.C. (2024). **The principal components of electoral regimes: separating autocracies from pseudo-democracies**. *R. Soc. Open Sci. 11240262.*

Wilson, M.C., Andersen, D. (2024). **Economic growth, largest-party vote shares, and electoral authoritarianism**. *Electoral Studies. 92:102879.*

V-Dem Working Papers and Reports

V-Dem Working Papers

2024

Prince Selorm Tetteh and Amanda B. Edgell. (2024). **Education, Indoctrination, and Mass Mobilization in Autocracies**. *V-Dem Working Paper, 151.*

David Randahl, Maxine Leis, Tim Gåsste, Hanne Fjelde, Håvard Hegre, Staffan I. Lindberg, and Steven Wilson. (2024). **Forecasting Electoral Violence**. *V-Dem Working Paper, 150.*

Aurel Croissant and Lars Lott. (2024). **Democratic Resilience in the Twenty-First Century. Search for an analytical framework and explorative analysis**. *V-Dem Working Paper, 149.*

Oskar Rydén, Marina Povitkina, Sverker C. Jagers, and Martin Sjöstedt. (2024). **Political Consequences of Natural Disasters: Accidental Democratization?** *V-Dem Working Paper, 148.*

Marina Nord, Fabio Angiolillo, Martin Lundstedt, Felix Wiebrecht, and Staffan I. Lindberg. (2024). **When Autocratization is Reversed: Episodes of Democratic Turnarounds since 1900**. *V-Dem Working Paper, 147.*

V-Dem Reports and Policy Briefs

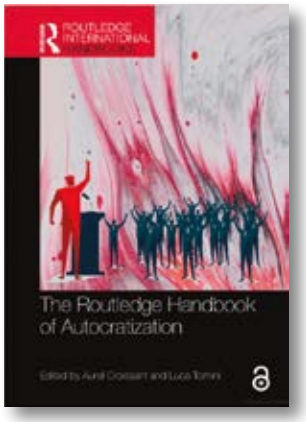
2024

Marina Nord, Juraj Medzihorsky, and Staffan I. Lindberg. (2024). **Democracy's Core Institution – Clean Elections Across the World**. *University of Gothenburg:* V-Dem Institute Report.

Marika Miner, with Natalia Natsika and Staffan I. Lindberg. (2024). **Internet Shutdowns Shutting Down Democracy**. *University of Gothenburg:* V-Dem Policy Brief, 40.

Evie Papada. (2024). **Democracy Endangered by Online Disinformation**. *University of Gothenburg:* V-Dem Policy Brief, 39.

Book chapters



The Routledge Handbook of Autocratization

Croissant, A., & Tomini, L. (Eds.)
2024 | Routledge

▶ The book comprehensively and systematically explores the current understanding, and unchartered research paths, of autocratization. With wide-reaching regional coverage and expert analysis, this handbook reveals cross-country, and cross-regional, analysis and insights and presents in-depth explanations and consequences of autocratization.

Showcasing cutting-edge research developments, the handbook illustrates the deeply complex nature of the field, examining important topics in need of renewed consideration at a time of growing concerns for democracy and the global spread of authoritarian challenges to democracy.

V-Dem Team member contributions

Chapter 4. **Measuring autocratization**.
Lars Lott and Aurel Croissant.

Chapter 5. **Identifying episodes of autocratization**.
Vanessa Boese-Schlosser, Amanda B. Edgell, Sebastian Hellmeier, Seraphine F. Maerz, Yuko Sato, Matthew C. Wilson, and Staffan I. Lindberg.

Chapter 6. **Economic development and autocratization**.
Carl Henrik Knutsen and Sven-Erik Skaaning.

Chapter 12. **Elections and autocratization**.
Sebastian Hellmeier and Elena Leuschner.

Chapter 15. **The Internet and autocratization**.
Seraphine F. Maerz.

Chapter 16. **Subnational dimensions of autocratization**.
Carlos Gervasoni.

Chapter 31. **Autocratization and political conflict**.
Seraphine F. Maerz, Felix Schulte, and Christoph Trinn.

Chapter 39. **East and Southeast Asia**.
Yuko Kasuya and Yi-Ting Wang.

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Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)

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Historical Data Archive (H-DATA)

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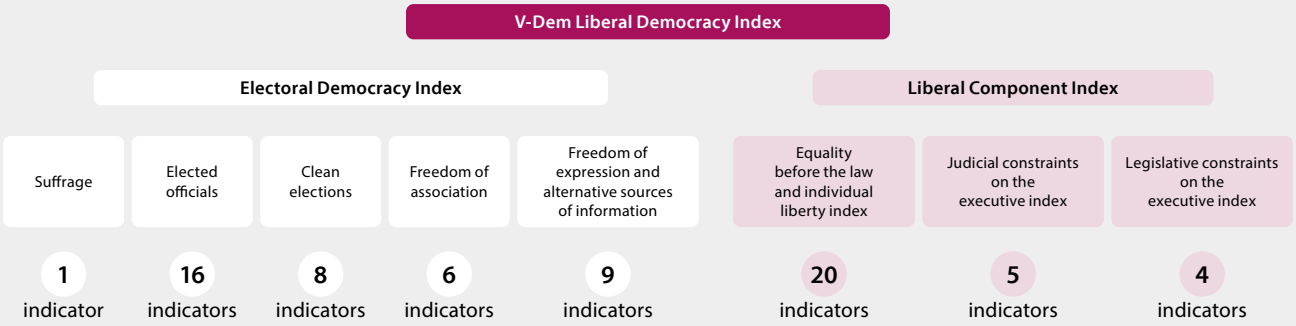
UMEÅ UNIVERSITY

V-Dem Indices

The Liberal Democracy Index

The V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) captures both liberal and electoral aspects of democracy based on the 71 indicators included in the Liberal Component Index (LCI) and the Electoral Democracy Index (EDI). The EDI reflects a relatively ambitious idea of electoral democracy where a number of institutional features guarantee free and fair elections such as freedom of association and freedom of expression. The LCI goes even further and captures the limits placed on governments in terms of two key aspects: The protection of individual liberties, and the checks and balances between institutions.

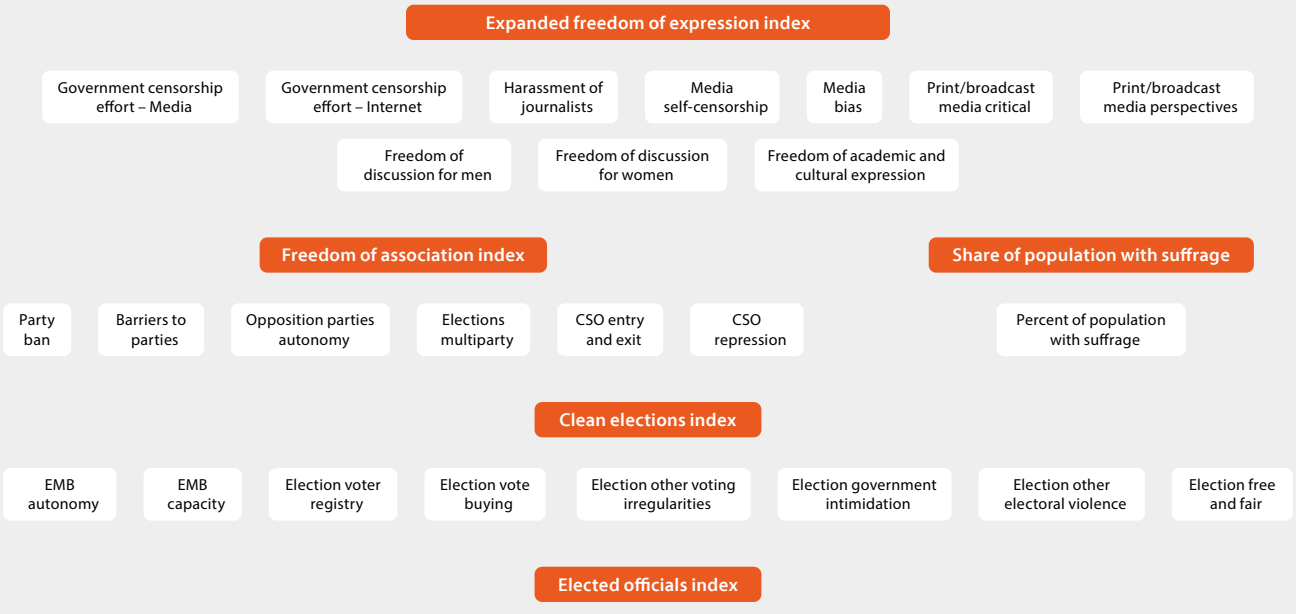
FIGURE A1. EXPLANATION OF THE V-DEM LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX



The Electoral Democracy Index

For several decades, scholars and practitioners alike depicted democracy in the world as though the extant measures really captured what is meant by the concept "electoral democracy". Yet, we have all known that they did not. V-Dem is the first systematic effort to measure the *de facto* existence of all the institutions in Robert Dahl's famous articulation of "polyarchy" as electoral democracy. The V-Dem Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) captures not only the extent to which regimes hold clean, free and fair elections, but also their actual freedom of expression, alternative sources of information and association, as well as male and female suffrage and the degree to which government policy is vested in elected political officials.

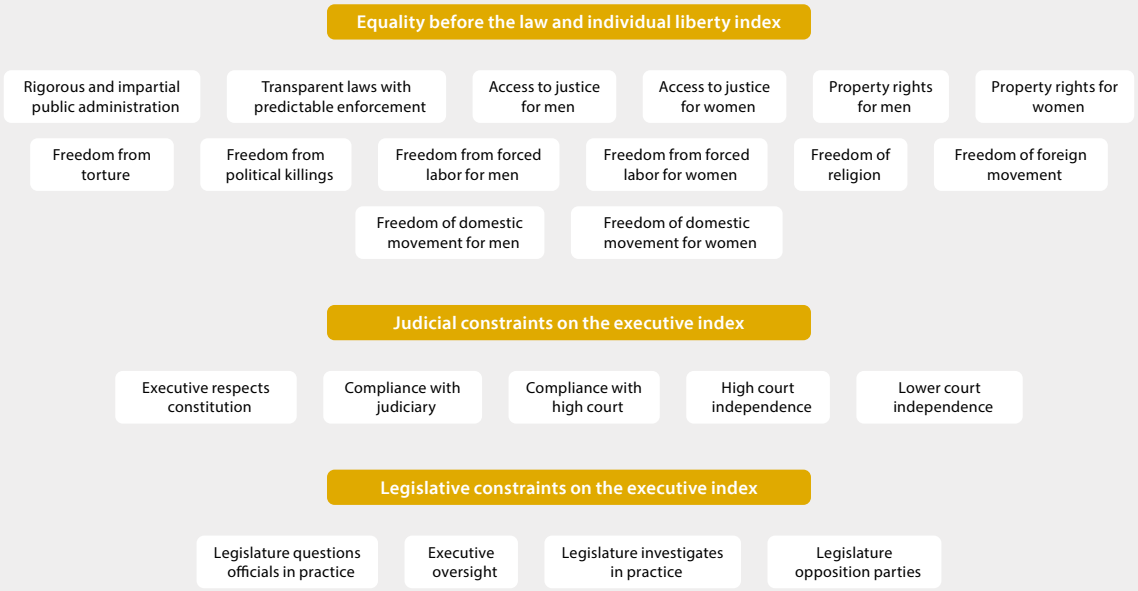
FIGURE A2. THE V-DEM ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (EDI)



The Liberal Component Index

In V-Dem's conceptual scheme the liberal principle of democracy embodies the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against both the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of the majority. It also captures the "horizontal" methods of accountability between more or less equally standing institutions that ensure the effective checks and balances between institutions and in particular limit the exercise of executive power. This is achieved by strong rule of law and constitutionally protected civil liberties, independent judiciary and strong parliament that are able to hold the executive to account and limit its powers. The three indices that capture these dimensions are: the equality before the law and individual liberties (v2xcl_rol), judicial constraints on the executive (v2x_jucon), and legislative constraints on the executive (v2xlg_legcon). Taken together they measure the V-Dem Liberal Component Index (v2x_liberal).

FIGURE A3. THE V-DEM LIBERAL COMPONENT INDEX (LCI)

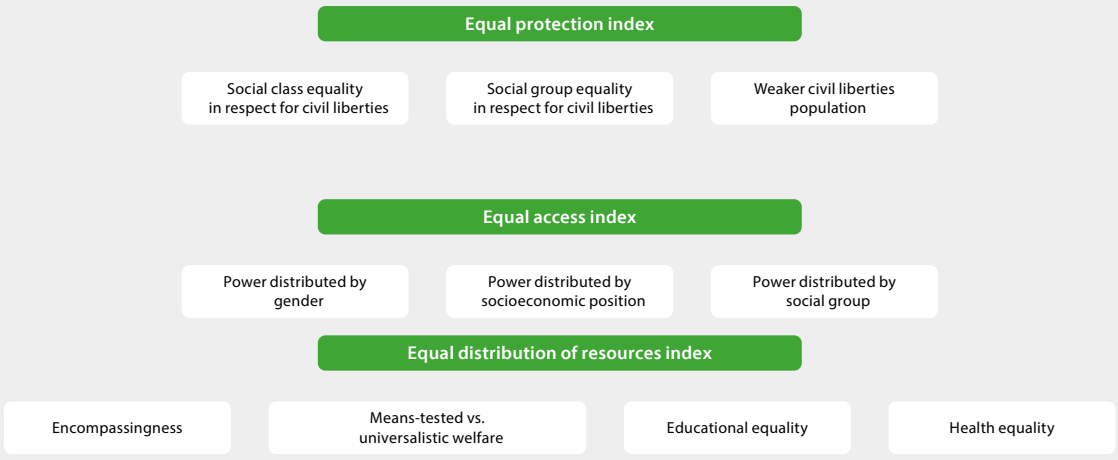

Equality before the law and individual liberty index
Rigorous and impartial public administration
Transparent laws with predictable enforcement
Access to justice for men
Access to justice for women
Property rights for men
Property rights for women
Freedom from torture
Freedom from political killings
Freedom from forced labor for men
Freedom from forced labor for women
Freedom of religion
Freedom of foreign movement
Freedom of domestic movement for men
Freedom of domestic movement for women
Judicial constraints on the executive index
Executive respects constitution
Compliance with judiciary
Compliance with high court
High court independence
Lower court independence
Legislative constraints on the executive index
Legislature questions officials in practice
Executive oversight
Legislature investigates in practice
Legislature opposition parties

The Egalitarian Component Index

The egalitarian principle of democracy measures to what extent all social groups enjoy equal capabilities to participate in the political arena. It relies on the idea that democracy is a system of rule "by the people" where citizens participate in various ways, such as making informed voting decisions, expressing opinions, demonstrating, running for office or influencing policy-making in other ways.

The egalitarian principle of democracy is fundamentally related to political participation, as systematic inequalities in the rights and resources of citizens of specific social groups limit capabilities to participate in the political and governing processes. Therefore, a more equal distribution of resources across groups results in political equality and hence democracy.

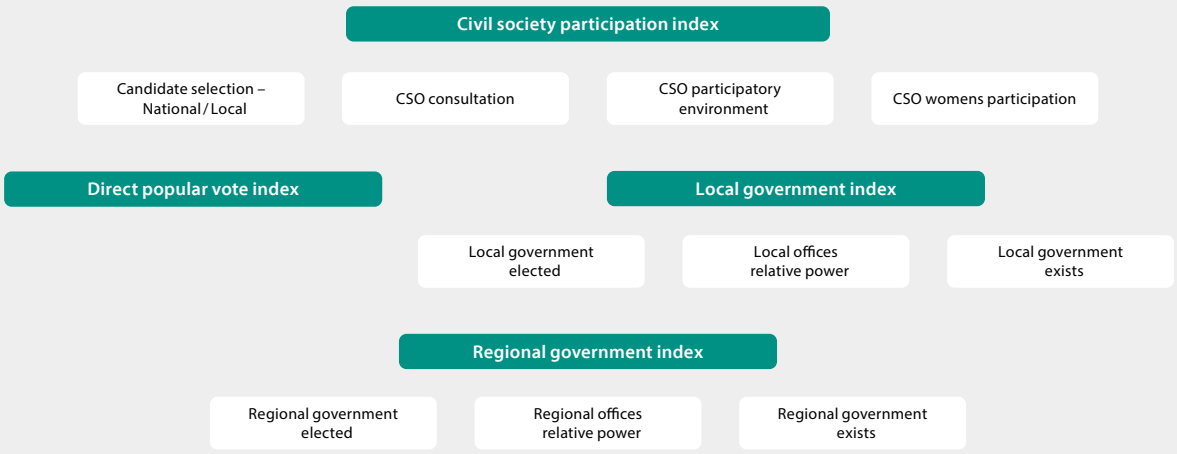
FIGURE A4. THE V-DEM EGALITARIAN COMPONENT INDEX (ECI)


Equal protection index
Social class equality in respect for civil liberties
Social group equality in respect for civil liberties
Weaker civil liberties population
Equal access index
Power distributed by gender
Power distributed by socioeconomic position
Power distributed by social group
Equal distribution of resources index
Encompassingness
Means-tested vs. universalistic welfare
Educational equality
Health equality

The Participatory Component Index

The participatory principle of democracy emphasizes active participation by citizens in all political processes, electoral and non-electoral. This principle prefers direct rule by citizens as practicable. The V-Dem Participatory Component Index (PCI) takes into account four important aspects of citizen participation: civil society organizations, mechanisms of direct democracy, and participation and representation through local and regional governments. Four different V-Dem indices capture these aspects and are the basis for the PCI.

FIGURE A5. THE V-DEM PARTICIPATORY COMPONENT INDEX (PCI)



The Deliberative Component Index

The V-Dem Deliberative Component Index (DCI) captures to what extent the deliberative principle of democracy is achieved. It assesses the process by which decisions are reached in a polity. A deliberative process is one in which public reasoning, focused on the common good, motivates political decisions – as contrasted with emotional appeals, solidary attachments, parochial interests or coercion. According to this principle, democracy requires more than an aggregation of existing preferences. There should also be respectful dialogue at all levels – from preference formation to final decision – among informed and competent participants who are open to persuasion.

FIGURE A6. THE V-DEM DELIBERATIVE COMPONENT INDEX (DCI)

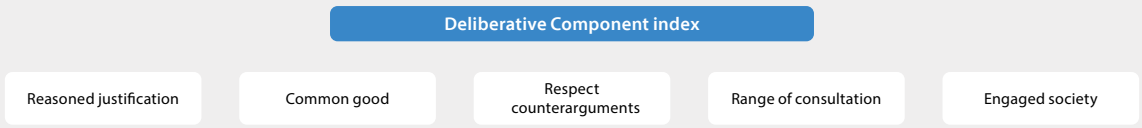
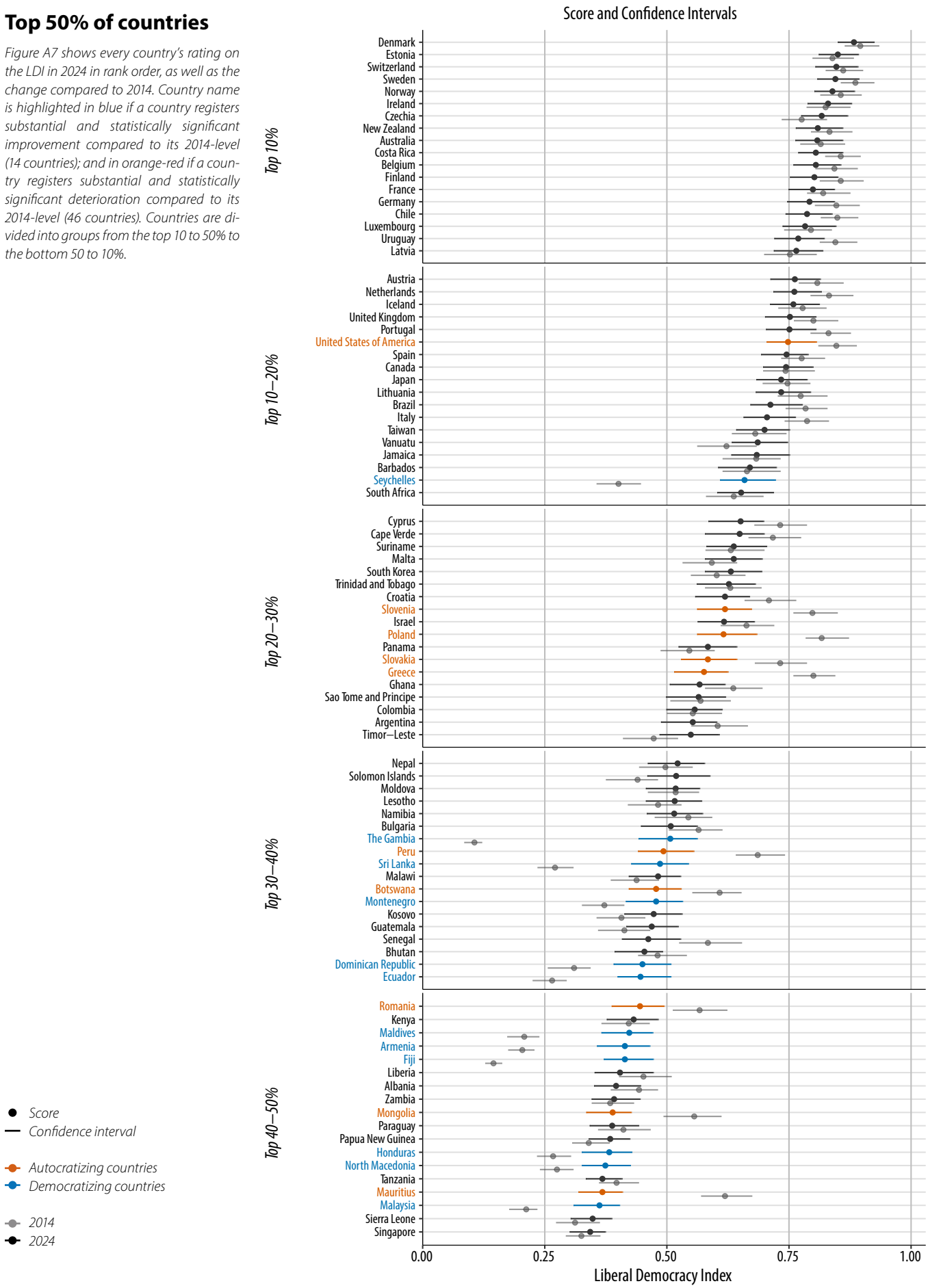


FIGURE A7. COUNTRIES BY SCORE ON V-DEM'S LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (LDI), 2014 COMPARED TO 2024

Top 50% of countries

Figure A7 shows every country's rating on the LDI in 2024 in rank order, as well as the change compared to 2014. Country name is highlighted in blue if a country registers substantial and statistically significant improvement compared to its 2014-level (14 countries); and in orange-red if a country registers substantial and statistically significant deterioration compared to its 2014-level (46 countries). Countries are divided into groups from the top 10 to 50% to the bottom 50 to 10%.



Bottom 50% of countries

TABLE A2. COUNTRY SCORES FOR THE LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (LDI) AND ALL COMPONENTS INDICES, 2024

↑ *Indicates that the country's score has improved over the past 10 years, substantially and at a statistically significant level*

↓ *Indicates that the country's score has decreased over the past 10 years, substantially and at a statistically significant level*

SD+/– reports the standard deviation to indicate the level of uncertainty

	LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (LDI)			ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (EDI)			LIBERAL COMPONENT INDEX (LCI)			EGALITARIAN COMPONENT INDEX (ECI)			PARTICIPATORY COMPONENT INDEX (PCI)			DELIBERATIVE COMPONENT INDEX (DCI)		
COUNTRY	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–	RANK	SCORE	SD+/–
Denmark	1	0.88	0.040	1	0.92	0.035	2	0.98	0.015	1	0.97	0.025	7	0.71	0.017	5	0.96	0.034
Estonia	2	0.85	0.042	2	0.90	0.037	7	0.96	0.022	13	0.90	0.051	31	0.63	0.034	30	0.87	0.077
Switzerland	3	0.85	0.045	4	0.89	0.039	5	0.96	0.024	3	0.94	0.043	1	0.88	0.019	2	0.98	0.019
Sweden	4	0.84	0.044	7	0.88	0.040	1	0.98	0.015	10	0.91	0.047	18	0.65	0.024	17	0.91	0.058
Norway	5	0.84	0.043	6	0.88	0.038	6	0.96	0.021	2	0.96	0.032	14	0.66	0.016	1	0.99	0.016
Ireland	6	0.83	0.047	3	0.90	0.040	15	0.93	0.033	22	0.87	0.057	32	0.63	0.039	18	0.90	0.060
Czechia	7	0.82	0.049	8	0.87	0.043	10	0.95	0.026	8	0.91	0.045	55	0.59	0.045	29	0.87	0.072
New Zealand	8	0.81	0.049	11	0.86	0.044	11	0.95	0.026	27	0.85	0.062	16	0.65	0.050	51	0.80	0.092
Australia	9	0.81	0.050	13	0.86	0.046	8	0.96	0.023	28	0.84	0.061	8	0.70	0.041 ↑	11	0.93	0.053
Belgium	10	0.80	0.051	5	0.89	0.043	22	0.91	0.040	7	0.93	0.038	23	0.64	0.027	25	0.89	0.070
Costa Rica	11	0.80	0.047	12	0.86	0.043	9	0.95	0.025	17	0.88	0.054	24	0.64	0.040 ↓	10	0.93	0.050
Finland	12	0.80	0.051	15	0.85	0.048	3	0.97	0.019	24	0.86	0.054	21	0.64	0.024	14	0.92	0.055
France	13	0.80	0.049	10	0.87	0.045	16	0.93	0.028	33	0.82	0.064	29	0.64	0.035	9	0.94	0.051
Germany	14	0.79	0.049	21	0.84	0.046	4	0.96	0.021	6	0.93	0.041	17	0.65	0.019	3	0.98	0.020
Chile	15	0.79	0.049	16	0.84	0.046	12	0.95	0.024	58	0.72	0.084	22	0.64	0.042	8	0.94	0.046
Luxembourg	16	0.78	0.054	9	0.87	0.047	25	0.90	0.039	4	0.94	0.04	71	0.57	0.073	4	0.97	0.028
Uruguay	17	0.77	0.051	14	0.85	0.045	19	0.91	0.037	44	0.78	0.079	2	0.81	0.040	37	0.84	0.083
Latvia	18	0.76	0.051	22	0.84	0.046	17	0.92	0.034	23	0.87	0.057	13	0.66	0.033 ↓	42	0.82	0.088
Austria	19	0.76	0.052	20	0.84	0.048	18	0.92	0.034	25	0.86	0.059	36	0.62	0.044 ↓	34	0.85	0.079
Netherlands	20	0.76	0.050	26	0.82	0.048	13	0.94	0.026	14	0.89	0.050	40	0.62	0.036	22	0.89	0.066
Iceland	21	0.76	0.052	17	0.84	0.047	23	0.91	0.040	9	0.91	0.052	12	0.66	0.033	20	0.90	0.065
United Kingdom	22	0.75	0.053	23	0.83	0.049	20	0.91	0.033	41	0.78	0.075	26	0.64	0.035	31	0.87	0.071
Portugal	23	0.75	0.052	24	0.83	0.048	21	0.91	0.034	38	0.80	0.068	45	0.61	0.043	23	0.89	0.068
USA	24	0.75	0.052 ↓	19	0.84	0.046	30	0.89	0.041 ↓	74	0.67	0.088	15	0.66	0.014	26	0.88	0.068
Spain	25	0.74	0.049	25	0.83	0.044	24	0.91	0.038	30	0.84	0.060	28	0.64	0.034	38	0.84	0.084
Canada	26	0.74	0.053	18	0.84	0.049	31	0.89	0.040	64	0.70	0.081	33	0.63	0.030	60	0.75	0.104
Japan	27	0.73	0.053	27	0.82	0.048	27	0.90	0.039	5	0.93	0.041	75	0.56	0.054	16	0.91	0.059
Lithuania	28	0.73	0.057	32	0.80	0.056	14	0.94	0.028	19	0.88	0.052	9	0.68	0.042	49	0.81	0.089
Brazil	29	0.71	0.052	30	0.80	0.052	29	0.90	0.032	88	0.62	0.089	35	0.63	0.034	7	0.94	0.043
Italy	30	0.70	0.053	28	0.80	0.048	32	0.88	0.042	12	0.90	0.049	4	0.75	0.034	32	0.86	0.078
Taiwan	31	0.70	0.055	31	0.80	0.049	33	0.88	0.045	21	0.87	0.059	5	0.75	0.031	35	0.84	0.080
Vanuatu	32	0.69	0.058	33	0.80	0.056	38	0.86	0.048	52	0.74	0.080	73	0.57	0.058	72	0.74	0.118
Jamaica	33	0.68	0.061	29	0.80	0.058	42	0.85	0.050	39	0.79	0.078	46	0.60	0.046	74	0.73	0.110
Barbados	34	0.67	0.059	34	0.79	0.058	40	0.85	0.047	29	0.84	0.063	144	0.30	0.034	12	0.93	0.052
Seychelles	35	0.66	0.058 ↑	42	0.74	0.058 ↑	28	0.90	0.040 ↑	31	0.83	0.071	141	0.30	0.049	6	0.95	0.044 ↑
South Africa	36	0.65	0.058	43	0.73	0.060	26	0.90	0.036	80	0.64	0.086	70	0.57	0.049	15	0.91	0.069
Cyprus	37	0.65	0.057	36	0.77	0.053	45	0.84	0.053	11	0.90	0.056	72	0.57	0.051	40	0.83	0.092
Cape Verde	38	0.65	0.060	38	0.76	0.059	39	0.86	0.046	57	0.72	0.080	90	0.53	0.061	80	0.70	0.110
Malta	39	0.64	0.060	35	0.78	0.054	52	0.80	0.060	15	0.89	0.059	27	0.64	0.052	52	0.80	0.093
Suriname	40	0.64	0.062	37	0.77	0.059	49	0.82	0.055	59	0.72	0.087	65	0.58	0.050	58	0.76	0.104
South Korea	41	0.63	0.057	45	0.73	0.057	34	0.87	0.041	26	0.86	0.062	44	0.61	0.043	48	0.81	0.087
Trinidad and Tobago	42	0.63	0.061	39	0.76	0.059	46	0.83	0.053	40	0.79	0.076	63	0.58	0.045	13	0.92	0.053
Croatia	43	0.62	0.056	48	0.72	0.057 ↓	37	0.86	0.047	43	0.78	0.073	37	0.62	0.052	84	0.68	0.114
Slovenia	44	0.62	0.056 ↓	49	0.72	0.057 ↓	36	0.87	0.043	16	0.89	0.055	6	0.75	0.034	33	0.86	0.074
Israel	45	0.62	0.057	50	0.72	0.060	35	0.87	0.040	34	0.81	0.072	48	0.60	0.046	57	0.77	0.097
Poland	46	0.62	0.061 ↓	46	0.73	0.062 ↓	43	0.84	0.047 ↓	18	0.88	0.051	42	0.61	0.054	36	0.84	0.082
Panama	47	0.58	0.059	47	0.73	0.059	53	0.79	0.060	99	0.58	0.094	91	0.52	0.062	71	0.74	0.103
Slovakia	48	0.58	0.058 ↓	40	0.75	0.055	70	0.75	0.064 ↓	45	0.77	0.077	20	0.65	0.050	136	0.37	0.122 ↓
Greece	49	0.58	0.056 ↓	41	0.75	0.055 ↓	73	0.74	0.058 ↓	20	0.88	0.055	25	0.64	0.039	41	0.83	0.084
Ghana	50	0.57	0.058	55	0.67	0.062	41	0.85	0.048	83	0.64	0.081	134	0.37	0.060	44	0.81	0.090
S.Tomé & P.	51	0.56	0.060	54	0.67	0.064	44	0.84	0.052	71	0.67	0.085	74	0.56	0.053	87	0.67	0.113
Colombia	52	0.56	0.056	53	0.70	0.057	58	0.78	0.056	110	0.53	0.097	30	0.63	0.048	91	0.64	0.128
Argentina	53	0.55	0.058	51	0.71	0.057	66	0.76	0.064	55	0.73	0.080	54	0.59	0.046	109	0.54	0.122
Timor-Leste	54	0.55	0.060	44	0.73	0.059	78	0.72	0.069	101	0.57	0.093	78	0.55	0.059	77	0.72	0.106
Nepal	55	0.52	0.058	56	0.67	0.063	68	0.76	0.059	96	0.58	0.082	62	0.58	0.049 ↑	95	0.61	0.123
Solomon Islands	56	0.52	0.062	57	0.66	0.068	63	0.76	0.059	117	0.51	0.086	79	0.55	0.057	115	0.49	0.129
Moldova	57	0.52	0.056	65	0.63	0.062	51	0.81	0.054	42	0.78	0.070	11	0.67	0.050	54	0.80	0.101
Lesotho	58	0.52	0.058	59	0.66	0.063	67	0.76	0.060	51	0.75	0.075	76	0.55	0.061	67	0.74	0.101
Namibia	59	0.52	0.058	68	0.62	0.065	48	0.82	0.055	131	0.44	0.098 ↓	111	0.47	0.069	81	0.70	0.115
Bulgaria	60	0.51	0.058	62	0.65	0.065	61	0.77	0.060	91	0.60	0.092	10	0.67	0.047	39	0.84	0.093
Gambia	61	0.51	0.059 ↑	63	0.63	0.064 ↑	55	0.78	0.060 ↑	75	0.67	0.085 ↑	56	0.59	0.053 ↑	63	0.75	0.096 ↑
Peru	62	0.49	0.057 ↓	64	0.63	0.063 ↓	65	0.76	0.061	116	0.51	0.085	47	0.60	0.058	129	0.41	0.128 ↓
Sri Lanka	63	0.49	0.058 ↑	58	0.66	0.064 ↑	82	0.70	0.062 ↑	72	0.67	0.086	52	0.59	0.052	93	0.62	0.131
Malawi	64	0.48	0.053	74	0.58	0.064	47	0.82	0.050	115	0.51	0.089	60	0.58	0.040	66	0.74	0.106
Botswana	65	0.48	0.054 ↓	73	0.59	0.063 ↓	54	0.79	0.060	66	0.68	0.085	108	0.48	0.068	124	0.43	0.132 ↓
Montenegro	66	0.48	0.058 ↑	70	0.62	0.065 ↑	69	0.76	0.064	47	0.76	0.078	64	0.58	0.051	75	0.72	0.106
Kosovo	67	0.47	0.060	61	0.65	0.064	84	0.69	0.069	68	0.68	0.088	110	0.47	0.066	106	0.55	0.120
Guatemala	68	0.47	0.054	72	0.60	0.063	62	0.77	0.055	150	0.33	0.081	51	0.59	0.058	96	0.59	0.126
Senegal	69	0.46	0.060	69	0.62	0.068	77	0.72	0.069	63	0.70	0.075	58	0.59	0.053	24	0.89	0.071
Bhutan	70	0.45	0.051	79	0.56	0.058	57	0.78	0.057	32	0.83	0.071	85	0.54	0.056	21	0.90	0.065
Dominican Republic	71	0.45	0.059 ↑	52	0.70	0.068	102	0.57	0.067 ↑	123	0.47	0.090	50	0.60	0.043	43	0.82	0.094
Ecuador	72	0.45	0.055 ↑	60	0.65	0.062	91	0.64	0.066 ↑	144	0.37	0.091 ↓	3	0.75	0.051 ↑	121	0.44	0.130
Romania	73	0.44	0.054 ↓	66	0.63	0.061	86	0.67	0.067 ↓	65	0.68	0.085	38	0.62	0.064	141	0.32	0.112 ↓
Kenya	74	0.43	0.053	80	0.55	0.065	64	0.76	0.056	112	0.52	0.090	59	0.58	0.045	50	0.81	0.096
Maldives	75	0.42	0.053 ↑	77	0.56	0.064 ↑	80	0.71	0.068 ↑	97	0.58	0.091	107	0.48	0.070	79	0.70	0.117
Armenia	76	0.41	0.054 ↑	67	0.62	0.063 ↑	97	0.61	0.070 ↑	37	0.80	0.070	121	0.41	0.082	82	0.69	0.119
Fiji	77	0.41	0.051 ↑	83	0.52	0.064 ↑	59	0.77	0.060 ↑	62	0.71	0.090	115	0.44	0.041 ↑	56	0.79	0.098
Liberia	78	0.40	0.060	71	0.61	0.070	99	0.61	0.075	102	0.57	0.080	112	0.46	0.037	46	0.81	0.097
Albania	79	0.40	0.048	86	0.51	0.059	72	0.74	0.064	70	0.67	0.088	87	0.54	0.055	128	0.42	0.125
Zambia	80	0.39	0.050	84	0.51	0.061	75	0.73	0.069	92	0.60	0.092	19	0.65	0.032	27	0.88	0.074 ↑
Mongolia	81	0.39	0.047 ↓	90	0.50	0.059 ↓	74	0.74	0.064	77	0.65	0.091	122	0.40	0.070	65	0.75	0.103
Paraguay	82	0.39	0.051	75	0.58	0.062	94	0.62	0.070	156	0.31	0.086	97	0.52	0.059	118	0.46	0.115
Papua New Guinea	83	0.38	0.044	95	0.46	0.056	56	0.78	0.059	125	0.46	0.086	99	0.51	0.060	112	0.51	0.123
Honduras	84	0.38	0.051 ↑	81	0.54	0.064	87	0.66	0.068 ↑	137	0.41	0.097	88	0.54	0.062	83	0.69	0.118
North Macedonia	85	0.37	0.049 ↑	78	0.56	0.060 ↑	98	0.61	0.068	94	0.60	0.088	57	0.59	0.058	101	0.59	0.117
Mauritius	86	0.37	0.046 ↓	91	0.49	0.057 ↓	83	0.70	0.068 ↓	60	0.71	0.086	68	0.57	0.054	53	0.80	0.106
Tanzania	87	0.37	0.039	103	0.42	0.052	50	0.82	0.052	50	0.75	0.078	80	0.55	0.071	85	0.68	0.121
Malaysia	88	0.36	0.048 ↑	82	0.52	0.060 ↑	90	0.64	0.069	61	0.71	0.088	86	0.54	0.053	86	0.67	0.111
Sierra Leone	89	0.35	0.043	96	0.44	0.054	76	0.73	0.071 ↑	81	0.64	0.092	61	0.58	0.056	19	0.90	0.071 ↑
Singapore	90	0.34	0.039	104	0.41	0.049	71	0.75	0.062	35	0.80	0.071	168	0.13	0.054	68	0.74	0.103

COUNTRY	LIBERAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (LDI)			ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (EDI)			LIBERAL COMPONENT INDEX (LCI)			EGALITARIAN COMPONENT INDEX (ECI)			PARTICIPATORY COMPONENT INDEX (PCI)			DELIBERATIVE COMPONENT INDEX (DCI)		
	RANK	SCORE	SD+/−	RANK	SCORE	SD+/−	RANK	SCORE	SD+/−	RANK	SCORE	SD+/−	RANK	SCORE	SD+/−	RANK	SCORE	SD+/−
BiH	91	0.34	0.046	85	0.51	0.059	96	0.61	0.069	76	0.65	0.086	95	0.52	0.055	94	0.61	0.120
Benin	92	0.33	0.047	89	0.50	0.062	101	0.59	0.071	48	0.75	0.080	106	0.49	0.064	108	0.54	0.123
Georgia	93	0.33	0.044	94	0.48	0.057	95	0.62	0.069	56	0.73	0.084	101	0.51	0.061	62	0.75	0.102
Indonesia	94	0.33	0.045	93	0.48	0.059	100	0.61	0.071	108	0.54	0.099	53	0.59	0.049	45	0.81	0.091
Hungary	95	0.32	0.040	97	0.44	0.053	88	0.65	0.066	84	0.64	0.085	89	0.53	0.060	143	0.31	0.108
Guyana	96	0.32	0.043	92	0.49	0.059	103	0.57	0.064	67	0.68	0.081	96	0.52	0.066	133	0.38	0.122
Nigeria	97	0.32	0.044	88	0.50	0.059	104	0.55	0.070	118	0.51	0.089	43	0.61	0.040	88	0.66	0.114
Bolivia	98	0.31	0.047	76	0.58	0.063	115	0.46	0.069	95	0.59	0.083	34	0.63	0.049	116	0.47	0.132
Philippines	99	0.31	0.043	98	0.44	0.056	93	0.63	0.077	155	0.31	0.094	69	0.57	0.057	111	0.53	0.136
India	100	0.29	0.036	105	0.40	0.050	92	0.64	0.067	134	0.42	0.092	93	0.52	0.056	92	0.63	0.114
Thailand	101	0.29	0.035	106	0.39	0.049	89	0.65	0.062	120	0.48	0.087	135	0.36	0.060	135	0.37	0.123
Jordan	102	0.27	0.023	126	0.27	0.024	60	0.77	0.061	98	0.58	0.096	143	0.30	0.071	28	0.88	0.079
Somaliland	103	0.27	0.037	101	0.42	0.049	105	0.55	0.074	159	0.31	0.088	94	0.52	0.061	99	0.59	0.117
Kuwait	104	0.27	0.025	121	0.29	0.026	79	0.72	0.067	90	0.61	0.085	163	0.15	0.059	123	0.43	0.148
Zanzibar	105	0.26	0.028	120	0.30	0.029	85	0.69	0.074	73	0.67	0.093	129	0.38	0.082	61	0.75	0.103
Tunisia	106	0.26	0.041	99	0.43	0.057	110	0.50	0.069	36	0.80	0.067	100	0.51	0.066	64	0.75	0.100
Ivory Coast	107	0.25	0.039	100	0.43	0.053	112	0.48	0.073	109	0.54	0.094	49	0.60	0.051	69	0.74	0.108
Mexico	108	0.25	0.042	87	0.50	0.060	124	0.40	0.069	129	0.44	0.086	41	0.62	0.059	126	0.42	0.117
Morocco	109	0.25	0.023	131	0.26	0.023	81	0.70	0.067	103	0.55	0.097	117	0.43	0.072	47	0.81	0.091
Ukraine	110	0.23	0.035	107	0.39	0.049	111	0.49	0.076	82	0.64	0.090	67	0.58	0.053	55	0.79	0.097
Iraq	111	0.23	0.032	109	0.35	0.045	108	0.52	0.073	126	0.46	0.094	116	0.44	0.073	97	0.59	0.131
Madagascar	112	0.22	0.036	102	0.42	0.048	121	0.42	0.075	154	0.32	0.091	104	0.49	0.070	130	0.39	0.124
Serbia	113	0.22	0.028	116	0.32	0.034	106	0.54	0.070	54	0.74	0.079	77	0.55	0.057	114	0.49	0.121
Lebanon	114	0.21	0.030	110	0.35	0.037	114	0.46	0.075	141	0.38	0.099	119	0.42	0.077	105	0.56	0.127
Uganda	115	0.20	0.026	128	0.27	0.029	107	0.54	0.076	121	0.48	0.097	120	0.42	0.068	90	0.66	0.114
Pakistan	116	0.20	0.029	117	0.31	0.034	113	0.48	0.075	170	0.22	0.073	102	0.50	0.066	110	0.53	0.129
Kyrgyzstan	117	0.18	0.029	113	0.33	0.043	122	0.41	0.068	86	0.62	0.087	123	0.40	0.069	134	0.37	0.116
Niger	118	0.18	0.016	135	0.24	0.016	109	0.51	0.050	79	0.65	0.071	66	0.58	0.060	70	0.74	0.112
Togo	119	0.17	0.029	108	0.36	0.043	130	0.36	0.068	85	0.62	0.094	113	0.46	0.068	76	0.72	0.106
Mozambique	120	0.17	0.025	118	0.30	0.032	123	0.41	0.069	119	0.50	0.086	98	0.51	0.058	119	0.46	0.119
Angola	121	0.16	0.026	111	0.34	0.043	131	0.35	0.061	163	0.27	0.080	161	0.15	0.062	138	0.34	0.113
Zimbabwe	122	0.16	0.023	129	0.27	0.029	126	0.39	0.068	147	0.34	0.084	81	0.55	0.055	104	0.58	0.117
Gabon	123	0.16	0.019	136	0.23	0.017	118	0.44	0.061	78	0.65	0.093	39	0.62	0.058	102	0.58	0.130
Guinea-Bissau	124	0.15	0.019	125	0.28	0.018	129	0.36	0.059	124	0.47	0.090	140	0.32	0.058	137	0.35	0.118
Mali	125	0.15	0.020	143	0.20	0.018	117	0.44	0.068	87	0.62	0.078	82	0.54	0.063	73	0.73	0.107
Cameroon	126	0.14	0.023	123	0.29	0.029	133	0.33	0.066	114	0.51	0.091	151	0.24	0.064	150	0.24	0.106
Oman	127	0.14	0.020	152	0.17	0.017	116	0.44	0.071	100	0.57	0.083	127	0.39	0.068	156	0.19	0.089
Mauritania	128	0.14	0.027	114	0.33	0.043	145	0.27	0.067	153	0.32	0.085	84	0.54	0.077	103	0.58	0.135
Kazakhstan	129	0.13	0.022	127	0.27	0.034	134	0.33	0.059	106	0.54	0.090	146	0.29	0.073	113	0.50	0.128
DRC	130	0.13	0.027	115	0.33	0.038	144	0.27	0.070	136	0.42	0.100	131	0.38	0.072	107	0.55	0.150
Hong Kong	131	0.13	0.019	156	0.17	0.021	119	0.42	0.065	53	0.74	0.075	167	0.14	0.056	163	0.15	0.079
Burkina Faso	132	0.13	0.020	162	0.16	0.018	120	0.42	0.070	111	0.52	0.088	125	0.39	0.081	153	0.22	0.094
Egypt	133	0.13	0.020	146	0.19	0.017	127	0.39	0.067	149	0.33	0.083	153	0.21	0.053	144	0.30	0.110
Somalia	134	0.13	0.020	157	0.17	0.018	125	0.40	0.069	157	0.31	0.090	148	0.27	0.061	78	0.71	0.114
Vietnam	135	0.12	0.021	154	0.17	0.018	128	0.38	0.073	89	0.61	0.094	103	0.50	0.065	89	0.66	0.117
Djibouti	136	0.12	0.020	134	0.25	0.025	137	0.30	0.060	104	0.54	0.093	132	0.38	0.076	132	0.38	0.117
Congo	137	0.12	0.023	133	0.25	0.027	139	0.28	0.070	145	0.36	0.098	83	0.54	0.064	122	0.44	0.123
Palestine/West Bank	138	0.12	0.020	139	0.21	0.020	135	0.32	0.065	105	0.54	0.087	109	0.47	0.085	159	0.18	0.103
Türkiye	139	0.12	0.021	122	0.29	0.030	146	0.26	0.058	107	0.54	0.090	118	0.42	0.064	158	0.18	0.089
Algeria	140	0.12	0.021	132	0.26	0.031	141	0.28	0.061	69	0.67	0.086	155	0.21	0.062	120	0.44	0.126
Comoros	141	0.11	0.020	124	0.28	0.030	148	0.23	0.057	93	0.60	0.089	92	0.52	0.061	125	0.42	0.133
Libya	142	0.11	0.020	145	0.20	0.018	138	0.30	0.068	142	0.38	0.091	152	0.23	0.065	59	0.75	0.108
Laos	143	0.10	0.020	167	0.13	0.014	132	0.34	0.074	133	0.43	0.094	128	0.39	0.053	160	0.16	0.092
CAR	144	0.10	0.021	119	0.30	0.035	157	0.19	0.059	162	0.28	0.071	142	0.30	0.073	142	0.31	0.130
Ethiopia	145	0.10	0.019	130	0.26	0.031	150	0.22	0.054	135	0.42	0.089	138	0.34	0.066	117	0.47	0.127
Eswatini	146	0.10	0.021	168	0.13	0.017	136	0.32	0.077	168	0.24	0.080	130	0.38	0.068	154	0.20	0.096
Iran	147	0.09	0.017	158	0.17	0.019	142	0.28	0.060	122	0.47	0.093	174	0.09	0.046	139	0.32	0.128
El Salvador	148	0.09	0.017	112	0.34	0.042	164	0.14	0.038	166	0.26	0.077	114	0.45	0.063	148	0.27	0.103
Rwanda	149	0.09	0.019	141	0.20	0.021	147	0.24	0.064	113	0.52	0.098	126	0.39	0.087	100	0.59	0.120
Qatar	150	0.08	0.015	173	0.09	0.016	140	0.28	0.057	139	0.40	0.059	171	0.10	0.035	131	0.39	0.116
Haiti	151	0.08	0.016	137	0.22	0.019	154	0.19	0.050	176	0.13	0.057	149	0.26	0.057	98	0.59	0.131
UAE	152	0.08	0.016	171	0.10	0.016	143	0.27	0.058	127	0.45	0.079	175	0.09	0.056	145	0.30	0.111
Uzbekistan	153	0.08	0.014	138	0.22	0.022	155	0.19	0.046	132	0.44	0.091	157	0.20	0.058	127	0.42	0.119
Guinea	154	0.07	0.017	160	0.16	0.017	149	0.22	0.060	130	0.44	0.091	124	0.40	0.078	152	0.22	0.096
Burundi	155	0.07	0.016	151	0.17	0.015	153	0.20	0.058	165	0.26	0.085	139	0.32	0.089	165	0.13	0.084
South Sudan	156	0.07	0.017	161	0.16	0.017	151	0.21	0.059	177	0.13	0.063	166	0.14	0.059	169	0.10	0.065
Bangladesh	157	0.07	0.013	142	0.20	0.022	152	0.20	0.044	151	0.32	0.091	150	0.24	0.070	146	0.29	0.111
Cambodia	158	0.06	0.013	147	0.19	0.016	166	0.13	0.043	172	0.21	0.076	156	0.21	0.090	157	0.18	0.088
Russia	159	0.06	0.011	155	0.17	0.014	161	0.14	0.039	143	0.37	0.087	133	0.38	0.053	168	0.11	0.073
Cuba	160	0.06	0.012	148	0.18	0.016	163	0.14	0.041	49	0.75	0.075	159	0.17	0.071	147	0.29	0.108
Azerbaijan	161	0.05	0.011	150	0.17	0.015	165	0.13	0.038	146	0.34	0.075	172	0.10	0.036	171	0.09	0.062
Syria	162	0.05	0.014	165	0.14	0.008	160	0.16	0.051	169	0.23	0.073	158	0.19	0.065	172	0.09	0.057
Chad	163	0.05	0.012	140	0.20	0.022	169	0.12	0.039	173	0.20	0.074	136	0.34	0.070	140	0.32	0.116
Palestine/Gaza	164	0.05	0.014	172	0.10	0.011	158	0.18	0.053	138	0.41	0.091	154	0.21	0.079	167	0.11	0.079
Bahrain	165	0.05	0.011	170	0.12	0.016	159	0.16	0.041	140	0.38	0.071	169	0.12	0.060	161	0.16	0.077
Tajikistan	166	0.05	0.013	153	0.17	0.013	168	0.12	0.044	174	0.20	0.070	165	0.14	0.049	164	0.14	0.074
Equatorial Guinea	167	0.05	0.012	149	0.18	0.014	170	0.11	0.042	148	0.34	0.088	170	0.11	0.047	170	0.09	0.066
Venezuela	168	0.05	0.010	144	0.20	0.017	172	0.10	0.033	167	0.26	0.088	105	0.49	0.065	177	0.02	0.025
Saudi Arabia	169	0.05	0.013	179	0.01	0.006	156	0.19	0.051	128	0.45	0.082	176	0.08	0.049	149	0.26	0.111
Yemen	170	0.05	0.014	169	0.13	0.015	162	0.14	0.049	178	0.09	0.049	160	0.17	0.064	166	0.13	0.078
Sudan	171	0.04	0.011	166	0.14	0.016	171	0.10	0.040	175	0.19	0.071	147	0.29	0.063	162	0.16	0.086
Belarus	172	0.04	0.008	159	0.16	0.013	173	0.08	0.028	46	0.76	0.080	164	0.15	0.051	175	0.06	0.051
China	173	0.04	0.010	177	0.07	0.005	167	0.12	0.038	160	0.30	0.085	173	0.10	0.049	151	0.23	0.100
Turkmenistan	174	0.03	0.009	164	0.15	0.009	174	0.08	0.032	161	0.29	0.075	177	0.07	0.039	176	0.04	0.038
Nicaragua	175	0.02	0.005	163	0.15	0.010	178	0.02	0.016	164	0.27	0.081	145	0.30	0.053	178	0.02	0.023
Afghanistan	176	0.02	0.007	176	0.08	0.007	175	0.04	0.026	179	0.08	0.045	178	0.03	0.023	173	0.07	0.061
Myanmar	177	0.02	0.005	174	0.08	0.008	176	0.04	0.017	171	0.21	0.076	137	0.34	0.064	155	0.20	0.094
North Korea	178	0.01	0.007	175	0.08	0.009	177	0.03	0.027	158	0.31	0.075	162	0.15	0.034	179	0.02	0.020
Eritrea	179	0.01	0.003	178	0.07	0.003	179	0.02	0.013	152	0.32	0.100	179	0.02	0.025	174	0.07	0.053

Global Standards, Local Knowledge

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V-Dem INSTITUTE

Department of Political Science
University of Gothenburg
Sprängkullsgatan 19, PO 711
SE 405 30 Gothenburg Sweden
contact@v-dem.net
+46 (0) 31 786 30 43
www.v-dem.net
www.bsky.app/profile/vdeminstitute.bsky.social
www.linkedin.com/company/vdeminstitute